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BEHIND THE FRONT LINES OF THE CIVIL WAR

POLITICAL PARTIES AND SOCIAL
MOVEMENTS IN RUSSIA, 1918–1922

Vladimir N. Brovkin

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To Karen and Katia

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Abbreviations

CC	Central Committee
CEC	Central Executive Committee of Soviets, the official state legislative institution.
Cheka	Extraordinary Commission: Communist political police in charge of the Red Terror.
CP	Communist party
CPC	Council of People's Commissars—government
EC	Executive Committee: a local soviet executive branch for a city or province nominally responsible to an elected assembly, city soviet or province soviet
GPU	State Political Directorate: a successor to the Cheka after 1921
Kadet	Russian KD or Constitutional Democrats: a party of Russian liberals, outlawed by the Bolsheviks in December 1917
NEP	New Economic Policy
NKVD	People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs
Orgburo	Organizational Bureau: one of the three top Communist party institutions, along with the Politburo and the Secretariat
PLSR	Party of Left Socialist Revolutionaries
PS	People's Socialists: a party of moderate socialists and liberals
PSR	Party of Socialist Revolutionaries
RCP(b)	Official name of the Communist party: Russian Communist Party of Bolsheviks
Rev. Coms.	Revolutionary Committees: ad hoc committees of Communists in the provinces that replaced elected institutions, such as soviets
RSDRP	Russian abbreviation of RSDWP—Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party, official name of the Mensheviks
SD	See RSDRP
Socialists	Common name of all non-Bolshevik political parties of the Left
SR	Socialist Revolutionary
Ts.G.A.O.R.	Central State Archive of the October revolution
Ts.G.A.S.A.	Central State Archive of the Soviet Army
Ts.P.A.	Central Party Archive
Vecheka	All-Russian Extraordinary Commission

BEHIND THE FRONT LINES OF THE CIVIL WAR

Introduction

THREE QUARTERS of a century after the Bolsheviks seized power in Petrograd, Russia is in the process of shaking off the Bolshevik legacy. Cities, towns, and streets named after Lenin and other Bolshevik leaders have had their pre-Bolshevik names restored. Bolshevik ideology, values, and social structure are disappearing fast. Many journalists, historians, and public figures have begun to express doubt as to whether the civil war was necessary and whether the Bolshevik victory was indeed a blessing. In fact, the Bolshevik revolution and the civil war are increasingly viewed in Russia as a national tragedy, which disrupted the natural course of development. The October revolution has been described as the Great October Counterrevolution, which led to carnage, terror, and famine.¹

The Civil War and the Communist Myth

The Russian civil war has been an object of manipulation for decades. At first, it was a source of myths serving the needs of Communist state building. Hundreds, indeed thousands, of books were written by obedient servants of the Communist state describing the glorious Bolshevik victory in the civil war. It was a much simplified history that divided all participants into heroes and villains. The Bolsheviks were the heroes led by the greatest hero of all times, comrade Lenin, the wisest teacher and leader of all proletarians worldwide. The villains were the Whites, hirelings of world imperialism and reactionaries who, relying on foreign money and war supplies, strove to strangle the young Soviet Republic. They failed miserably in their counterrevolutionary endeavors because the entire Russian people, so the myth goes, rose in a heroic effort to defend their own Soviet power of workers and peasants. The outcome was supposed to prove that History was on the side of the Communists because the progressive forces of the revolution won over the reactionary ones.

Few were bothered by the fact that this official history simplified the complexity of the war. It was a history without politics, as though there were no political struggles between political parties, or inside the Bolshevik party over policy choices, or within the White movement over power and policy. The official history falsified the role and aspirations of the most important social

¹ Inar Mochalov, "U istokov velikoi Vandei," *Ogonek*, no. 45 (October 1991), 1. For a perceptive discussion of changes in Soviet writing on the revolution during the glasnost era, see Eberhard Müller, "Blick Zurück im Zorn?! Bürgerkrieg, Kriegskommunismus und Neue Ökonomische Politik," in Geyer, ed., *Die Umwertung der Sowjetischen Geschichte*, pp. 75–103.

groups, such as workers and peasants. The workers have always been depicted as following the Bolshevik party with enthusiasm for the cause of Communist construction. All the lesser-known protests, strikes, and rebellions were simply omitted, and everyone pretended as if none of them had happened. The most violent outbreaks which could not be purged from history, such as the strikes in Moscow and Petrograd in February 1921, were treated as local, temporary, and unimportant eruptions of social unrest engineered by the hirelings of the bourgeoisie, the Mensheviks and SRs. The peasant movement of the Greens likewise was a taboo subject until very recently. And such cases as the Tambov peasant rebellion, which due to their magnitude could not be ignored, were relegated to regional history as examples of a Russian Vendée.

Thinking on the civil war clearly changed during the Gorbachev years. Cautiously journalists (but few historians) began to raise the forbidden questions such as the role of Lenin in the introduction of the Red Terror, the true dimensions of the decossackization campaign in 1919, or the extent of reprisals against the clergy or the peasants.² Unfortunately, the main thrust of the glasnost-era reevaluation focused on the spectacular episodes. The silent mission of journal editors seems to have been to find the most gruesome evidence of Bolshevik atrocities.³ At the same time the Whites received considerable attention for the first time. A pro-Communist myth was replaced by an anti-Communist one. If the earlier myth had to prove that the Bolsheviks were the heroes and their opponents the villains, now the Bolsheviks became the villains and their opponents the heroes. Since the Bolsheviks were state terrorists, their opponents must have been the saviors of Russia. Their slogan, For Russia, United and Indivisible, was appealing to many. Some even went as far as to idealize the Whites. Indeed, one can speak of a White movement cult in contemporary Russia.⁴

² On peasants, see Iurii Borisov, "Zigzagi i tupiki agrarnoi politiki posleoktiabr'skogo de-siatiletia," *Kommunist*, no. 2 (1991), 110–13, and V. D. Dement'ev and V. V. Samoshkin, "Vosstaniia krestian na Tambovshchine v 1920–21 godakh," *Istoriia SSSR*, no. 6 (1990), 99–100. On decossackization, see Aleksandr Kozlov, "Raskazachivanie," *Rodina* (1990), 40–44. On Lenin, see A. Mokrousov, ed., "Lenin," *Ogonek*, no. 7 (February 1992), 10–12; for a scholarly discussion of the changing attitudes to Lenin, see Benno Ennker, "Ende des Mythos. Lenin in der Kontroverse," in Geyer, ed., *Die Umwertung der Sowjetischen Geschichte*, pp. 54–75. See also a collection of the glasnost-era Soviet articles on history in Raleigh, ed., *Soviet Historians and Perestroika*.

³ See, for example, an article equating Bolshevism with fascism and listing Bolshevik crimes against the Russian people: Viacheslav Kostikov, "Liutsifer na Russkom Rendez-vous," *Ogonek*, no. 4 (January 1992), 9–10.

⁴ This is manifested by a steady stream of monarchist and White Guards' literature: Zhiliar, *Imperator Nikolai II*; Denikin, *Ocherki Russkoi smuty*; Dieterikhs, *Ubiistvo Tsarskoi sem'i i chlenov doma Romanovykh na Urale*; and an unambiguously anti-Semitic pamphlet by von Lampe, *Tragediia Beloi Armii*, to name only a few. In addition to reprints, some historians, such as V. G. Bortnevsky, have published dozens and dozens of articles on the patriotic activities of various White generals, the White administration, plans for the overthrow of the Bolsheviks, etc., particularly in the new journal *Russkoe Proshloe* (1991).

The problem with the post-Communist appraisal of the civil war is that it remains a tool in the myth making. Virtually no one regards the Russian civil war as a problem of the Russians themselves. The nationalist circles in Russia today go out of their way to demonstrate that the Bolsheviks were led by Jews and their victory in the civil war was nothing but a victory of Marxist Jewish conspirators over Holy Russia.⁵ For the sake of myths, historical facts are conveniently forgotten. In fact it was the *Russian* peasants, who had never heard of any Marxism, who refused to fight for mother Russia and helped the Bolsheviks to power in 1917. In fact it was the *Russian* regiments, not Jewish, who abandoned the front in the fall of 1917 and pillaged Russian villages in their famous retreat. Without any instruction from the Marxists, they poked icons with their bayonets in desecrated churches, set scores of noble estates on fire, and murdered their officers en masse. Today's patriots prefer to ignore that kind of history because they need to maintain the myth that Marxists, Jews, and foreigners were to blame for Russia's misfortunes.

The liberals write of the civil war as a national tragedy in which everybody suffered and every group bore enormous casualties. Their key theme is repentance, to heal Russia's wounds. Yet they strongly imply that if there was a root cause of that tragedy, it was Marxism-Leninism.⁶ The liberals prefer to focus their attention on Bolshevik atrocities because the great Russian people must be seen as victims and victims only in the civil war.⁷ The inability to see the Russian people as participants in their own self-destruction is the main problem in contemporary post-Communist Russian discussions of the civil war.

Western Myths

If in Russia throughout the late 1980s Bolshevik myths of the civil war were subjected to increasing criticism, the main thrust of Western historiography developed in the opposite direction. A spate of books discussed the proletarian consciousness of workers and their genuine support for the Bolsheviks.⁸ Bolshevik rule was portrayed as proletarian and in the interests of workers.⁹ Articles

⁵ See, for example, Aleksei Vinogradov, "'Chernaia ruka' masonov," *Molodaia Gvardiia*, no. 2 (1991), 119–22, and Petr Lanin, "Tainye pruzhiny istorii," *Molodaia Gvardiia*, no. 8 (1991), 251–65.

⁶ The most thoughtful and important statement in this school of thought was made by Aleksander Tsipko, "O zonakh zakrytykh dlia mysli," in Senokosov, ed., *Surovaia drama naroda*, pp. 175–258.

⁷ See, for example, an article drawing a sharp distinction between the "bad" Bolsheviks and the "good" Russian people: Boris Mozhaev, "Ia teriaius," *Ogonek*, no. 49 (December 1991), 12–13.

⁸ See, for example, Koenker, *Moscow Workers and the 1917 Revolution*; Smith, *Red Petrograd*; Mandel, *Petrograd Workers and the Soviet Seizure of Power*.

⁹ Sheila Fitzpatrick, for example, wrote about "active support of urban working class for the Bolsheviks" in *The Russian Revolution*, p. 70. See also William Rosenberg, "Identities, Power, and Social Interaction in Revolutionary Russia," *Slavic Review*, vol. 47, no. 1 (1988), 27.

appeared discussing the democratic political culture of the Bolsheviks.¹⁰ The Bolshevik victory in the civil war was explained by social support for the Bolsheviks:

Indeed in weighing the significance of these workers' contribution to the eventual result, one needs to consider not only the part played in the Bolshevik seizure of power in Moscow and the patterns in the elections to the Constituent Assembly, but also the ways in which the dramatic advances of the White armies in the course of the civil war were repeatedly stopped and eventually repelled once they reached and came up against these inner redoubts of Soviet power in the industrial towns and villages of the Central Industrial region.¹¹

Workers and peasants, it was asserted, in a choice between the Reds and the Whites preferred to support the Bolsheviks. Thanks to workers' support, the Bolsheviks won the civil war.¹² There did not seem to be any other logical explanation. If the Bolsheviks won, it must have been because they enjoyed popular support. The idea that it is possible to win a civil war against the will of the majority of the population has not been seriously considered.

The key theme in all these revisionist studies is that there was no alternative to Bolshevik rule. Few studies on alternative forces in Russian society have appeared. To date there is still no study of the Green movement on the national scale.¹³ There is not one full-length book on the SR party. There is not one Western study of the Red Terror or the attack on religion.¹⁴ The main thrust of revisionist historiography on the Russian revolution and the civil war was to confer legitimacy on Bolshevik rule. The revisionists tried to discredit the work of their critics as a product of the cold war and therefore biased against the Bolsheviks.¹⁵ In this endeavor the revisionists accepted many of the Bolshevik myths. The Russian civil war was conceptualized as a war between the Reds and the Whites only, that is, between the Communist-led Soviet Republic and the monarchist, reactionary White movement.¹⁶ Seen from this perspective, the Bolsheviks re-created a shattered and maladjusted Russian society in the

¹⁰ Alexandre Rabinowitch, "The Evolution of Local Soviets in Petrograd, November 1917–June 1918: The Case of the First City District Soviet," *Slavic Review*, vol. 46, no. 1 (1987), 20–38.

¹¹ Leopold Haimson, "The Problem of Social Identities in Early Twentieth Century Russia," *Slavic Review*, vol. 47, no. 1 (1988), 11.

¹² Moshe Lewin, "More Than One Piece Is Missing in the Puzzle," *Slavic Review*, vol. 44, no. 2 (1985), 243, and Remington, *Building Socialism in Bolshevik Russia*, p. 101.

¹³ Except for two regional studies: Figes, *Peasant Russia, Civil War*, and Radkey, *The Unknown Civil War in Soviet Russia*.

¹⁴ In fact the only study on the Red Terror ever undertaken was that by Sergey Melgunov, *Krasnyi terror v Rossii*.

¹⁵ One can cite here as the latest example the attacks on Richard Pipes's book, *The Russian Revolution*. See, for example, a review by William Rosenberg in *The Nation* (18 February 1991), 202–3.

¹⁶ For the latest detailed study along these lines, see Mawdsley, *The Russian Civil War*.

interest of workers.¹⁷ The revisionists brought Soviet Marxist categories of social analysis into Western historiography, such as the alliance of workers and peasants, the proletarian dictatorship, and Soviet democracy, as if these notions had existed in reality.¹⁸ The revisionists saw the Bolshevik victory in the civil war as a natural and progressive event in twentieth-century history.

The problem, however, is that the Communist regime was not really a republic, and there was no such thing as Soviet democracy, and the workers did not really exercise any dictatorship, and there was no alliance of workers and peasants, and the Bolsheviks were fighting not only the Whites. The historical record contradicts many of the established myths of the Bolsheviks and their Western promoters. The factor of rebellions, mutinies, and strikes has not been taken into account at all by this conceptualization. Neither does this approach allow for the role played by the socialist parties of Mensheviks and SRs, on both Red and White territory. Similarly, the war of both the Reds and the Whites against the nationalities is left out in a traditional Red versus White dichotomy. With the collapse of Communist mythology in Russia, Western revisionists find themselves in an intellectual dead end.

Historical Approaches

The history of the Russian civil war raises a number of fundamental questions of Russian history in general, such as the disintegration and centralization of the Russian state. Can Russia as a state be held together by force only? Is Russian identity inseparably linked to the empire? Or to put it in different words, can Russian statehood be reconciled with the loss of the empire? The Russian civil war brought forth the question that bedevils Russian rulers today, just as it bedeviled the provisional government, the Bolsheviks, and the Whites, namely, how to deal with regional identity and allegiance in Russia. Is Siberian or cossack regionalism an enemy of the Russian state? The Russian civil war was in many ways a conflict of a variety of Russian identities, a conflict that reflected the people's many loyalties to their villages and regions and to their social status and self-definition. The Russian civil war can be seen as an attempt by the Bolsheviks and by the Whites to reconquer the state. It was an attempt to reconstitute the empire of the tsars, cemented by a new and more dynamic ideology. And yet as we now know, the reconquest proved to be a temporary one. Old local and regional and national identities reemerged with a vengeance as soon as people freed themselves from fear. The old myths vanished, and old problems reappeared.

¹⁷ William Rosenberg, "Identities, Power, and Social Interaction in Revolutionary Russia," *Slavic Review*, vol. 47, no. 1 (1988), 27:

¹⁸ Viola, *Best Sons of the Fatherland*, pp. 9, 12, 14.

It is essential to conceptualize the course of the Russian civil war as an interaction of all social groups, political movements, and parties. The Bolsheviks were not free agents. Everything they did was in response to the actions of other participants. Most of their actions were improvisations for dealing with day-to-day emergencies. The decisions the Bolsheviks made reflected the composition of social and political forces within the Bolshevik party, which in turn reflected the political interests of the Bolsheviks' local organizations.

The shifting front lines of the civil war reflected the shifting allegiances of social classes, political parties, and popular movements. It is impossible to conceptualize the course of the Russian civil war without analyzing the political battles behind the front lines. Moreover, one can argue that the visible front lines of the civil war were merely a reflection of the real battles behind the front lines, battles that both the Bolsheviks and the Whites fought against Greens, cossacks, Ukrainians, and workers, and battles over policy between factions in the Bolshevik, Menshevik, and SR parties, and among the White generals. It is essential to see these processes as interrelated and interconnected in a dynamic disequilibrium. Decisions taken by the Bolsheviks concerning food supply policy or the extent of mobilization, for example, had a direct bearing on the political behavior of peasants and on the rate of desertion and consequently on the fortunes of the armies at the front line.

The trajectory of workers' and peasants' movements during the civil war cannot be explained by the Marxist or neo-Marxist social science methodology of revisionists. Why did the peasants in one province rise in rebellion but in another did not? Why did the peasants in the Volga basin rise against the Bolsheviks and welcome the Whites in the spring of 1919 but then abandon them three months later and welcome the Reds, only to turn against them in 1920 again? How can we explain such turns in popular behavior? Surely urbanization or education-level statistics or marriage patterns would not be very helpful. Many of these twists and turns in the behavior of peasants, workers, intelligentsia, cossacks, and nationalities become more clear when seen as reflecting changes in their self-definition and allegiance. Who did these people think they were? Did workers really think of themselves as members of the ruling class exercising dictatorship over the rest of society? Or did they perceive themselves as downtrodden and exploited individuals at the mercy of the new bosses? Did peasants define themselves as members of the toiling peasantry in alliance with the working class or as residents of their province first and foremost, and thus suspicious of any city newcomer? Identity defined allegiance, and allegiance determined participation in the civil war.

The main purpose of this book is to reconstruct the course of the civil war as a social and political interaction among diverse forces of Russian society. It is seen here as a dynamic, open-ended, ever changing, and unpredictable process that could have gone in a variety of directions at certain critical junctures. This is an attempt to explain the worldview and political behavior of the civil war's

key participants. It is an attempt to question some of the convenient myths that have prevailed in both Russia and the West.

The Road to Civil War

When the Bolsheviks seized power in Petrograd in October 1917 and the defenders of the provisional government tried to recapture the capital, the press referred to this struggle as the civil war. Similarly ten days later the fighting for control of Moscow was described as the civil war. Any fighting of Russians against Russians their contemporaries defined as a civil war. Few believed at that time that the civil war would ignite like fire with new vigor and then die down and that it would last four long years. In the fall of 1917 the Bolsheviks themselves were far from sure that they would hold power. The general expectation was that they would not survive for more than a few weeks at most. The Bolshevik seizure of power was a wild gamble. Russia was a peasant country and an empire. The Bolsheviks had no organizations in the countryside and definitely did not hold the dominant position in Ukraine, the Baltics, the Caucasus, Siberia, and other parts of the empire. It was certain that if they stayed in power in Petrograd, they would have to reconquer those areas by force.

For a long time the origins of the civil war remained obscure even in Soviet historiography. The Bolshevik victories in Petrograd and Moscow have always been portrayed as ushering in the "triumphal march of Soviet power." City after city, province after province proclaimed Soviet power and accepted the Soviet government in Petrograd as legitimate until the convocation of the Constituent Assembly. But if Soviet power had been established with such ease, how then explain the fact that a few months later the Bolshevik government faced a mortal danger from its opponents?¹⁹ Official Soviet historiography has never been able to explain this trajectory of Soviet politics in 1918.²⁰ Soviet historians referred to the malicious intrigues of the Whites, but the problem is that the Bolsheviks' key opponents in 1918 were not the Whites but the SR-led factions pushing to establish a democratically elected Constituent Assembly.

What Communist propagandists presented later as the "triumphal march of Soviet power" showed actually not allegiance to the Bolsheviks but a commitment to convene the Constituent Assembly. Soviet power in Petrograd was greeted by local soviets as a symbol of agreement between major political parties that the Constituent Assembly would be convened and that a way would be found out of political stalemate in the capital. The Bolsheviks' hold on power

¹⁹ John Keep subjected the establishment of Soviet power in the provinces to extensive scrutiny, "October in the Provinces," in Pipes, ed., *Revolutionary Russia*.

²⁰ For a glasnost-era discussion of Soviet historical literature on the origins and chronology of the civil war, see Iu. A. Korablev, "Grazhdanskaia voina 1918–1920. Noveye podkhody," in Kinkulkin, ed., *Stranitsy istorii Sovetskogo obshchestva*, pp. 56–88, here pp. 60–61.

was very tenuous and conditional, but their style bombastic and threatening, as if in need of bolstering their claim to power. In fact the Bolshevik government was not much of a government, because it could not govern. There were ministries that issued orders, but most of them were ignored. Trade unions, local soviets, and regiment commanders had more power over their local units than any minister. Power was in the streets, power was dispersed. Both the provisional and the Bolshevik governments (also called provisional at first) pretended that they held power, knowing fully well that their claims were on paper only.²¹

The first few months were indeed a carnival of revolution. The workers celebrated the victory of labor over capital. In practical terms this amounted to freedom from work. Now nobody had the power to force anybody to work. A not uncommon attitude among the workers was: "Let the exploiters, the bourgeoisie, work." Most of the time was spent rallying and passing resolutions. Directors and owners were rolled out of the plants to the jubilation of workers. Entire regiments of revolutionary soldiers were drunk. Gangs of robbers helped themselves to the property of others. Hundreds of officers were brutally murdered by their soldiers. In southern cities violent pogroms took place against Jews. In many cities law and order collapsed. It was a drunkard orgy, free-for-all violence, and anarchy.

For soldiers, the victory of the "proletarian revolution" meant freedom from fighting in the war. They were free to pick up their bayonets and go home. Hundreds of thousands of them did. On their way they pillaged and looted, and seized the "bourgeois property" of the exploiting classes. The victory of the "proletarian revolution" for peasants meant freedom from landlords and freedom from the state. Now they could finally divide the land equally. The day of the Black repartition of land had finally arrived. The dream of generations of peasants had finally come true. The peasants were burning landlords' estates and obliterating every sign of their presence in the countryside.

The Bolsheviks soon began to realize that this destructive radicalism of the masses had to be harnessed before it swept their government away, as it had the provisional government. They tried to accomplish this by encouraging destructive violence and channeling it into a vengeful "class struggle." They came out with the slogan *Loot the Looters*. Property could be taken back from the old elite because it had been stolen from the working people. The Bolsheviks tried to cast this great redistribution of wealth into Marxist categories of class struggle, and they tried to direct this energy against their political enemies. Bolshevism as a social movement in late 1917 and early 1918 was indistinguishable from anarchic and destructive popular upheaval. Bolshevism as a system of government was a lawless regime which boasted that it had abolished all bourgeois laws. The Bolsheviks were following the masses, pretending that they were

²¹ Richard Pipes discussed the concept of a claim to power in *The Russian Revolution*, p. 507.

leading them. Before too long they would venture to reimpose state control, which would generate resistance.

Educated society was atomized and incapacitated at the end of that fateful year. The conservative forces, the monarchists, the officers—those who later would be known as the Whites—were politically insignificant. They had suffered a great shock: the collapse of the monarchy, the collapse of any governmental authority, the defeat of the country in the Great War, and the disintegration of the empire. To make things worse, the government, from their point of view, was in the hands of German spies and subversive revolutionaries. No one seemed to know what to do or how and where to start resistance to this “madness,” as the conservatives would put it. General Aleksei Kaledin tried to organize the cossacks on the Don in December to repel the Bolshevik advance, but he failed, and the Bolsheviks overran the cossack lands and Ukraine.

For the socialists (the Mensheviks and SRs, the former leaders of the provisional government), the events of October–November 1917 were a catastrophe. They too were baffled and disoriented. Everything they believed in was falling to pieces. After the February revolution of 1917, they had tried to inaugurate a participatory democracy by granting substantial decision-making power to workers through the soviets; they had tried to involve the masses in the process of government. Yet nothing seemed to work. The masses were willing to follow those who offered ever more radical promises, even though such promises were, from the socialists’ point of view, unfulfillable. The Bolsheviks had promised the masses socialism, democracy, and prosperity as if by magic, if only all power was transferred to the soviets. The socialists were convinced that the Bolsheviks realized that there was no quick fix to Russia’s problems and were throwing the country into chaos in order to gain power, instead of acting responsibly with other socialist parties. The Mensheviks and SRs perceived the Bolsheviks as adventurers at best and liars at worst.

Not only the socialists, but all Russian educated society at the end of 1917 was horrified by its separateness from the Russian people. All the parties tried to adapt as best they could to an unprecedented popular upheaval, a social revolution that no one could direct or channel. In this political situation the Bolsheviks survived not because of popular support for socialism but because all their political opponents, from the Mensheviks to the monarchists, were disorganized, disoriented, and uncertain over the further course of action.

In January 1918 the Bolsheviks disbanded the Constituent Assembly by force. More than any other event this was the watershed which set the chain of events in motion leading to the civil war. The Bolsheviks had received about a quarter of the seats, largely because of support from soldiers at the front and radical workers in big cities, but their main opponents, the Socialist Revolutionaries, got over 40 percent.²² They were the clear winners, thanks largely to

²² Radkey, *Russia Goes to the Polls*.

the peasant vote. The party of Russian agrarian socialism, the party of Aleksandr Kerensky and the provisional government, still commanded the allegiance of the majority of Russian peasants.

The Socialist Revolutionaries were now convinced that the Bolsheviks had overthrown the provisional government and seized power not in order to secure the convocation of the Constituent Assembly, as they had publicly announced in October, but in order to establish a one-party dictatorship. Vigorous debates in the SR party focused on where and how rather than whether to resist the Bolshevik dictatorship. The moderates grouped around Victor Chernov, the chairman of the ill-fated Constituent Assembly, prevailed once again in the party dispute and decided to abstain from armed defense of the Constituent Assembly at the moment. Their assessment of the political situation was that the masses, primarily soldiers and the majority of peasants, were still in a state of euphoria over the defacto end of the war and repartition of land. They were not ready to rise to defend the Constituent Assembly and parliamentary democracy. The SRs' strategy was to wait until the peasants felt the burden of the Bolshevik dictatorship.

The Mensheviks were going through a similar agonizing process of defining policy. The party was in deep crisis because unlike the SRs, who had preserved their share of the peasant vote in the Constituent Assembly elections, the Mensheviks had done poorly. Most workers had supported the Bolsheviks. Or so it seemed. On a closer examination of workers' political attitudes it was apparent, however, that workers perceived the Bolsheviks as a radical workers' party which had promised speedy convocation of the Constituent Assembly, conclusion of the war, and an improved economic situation: Bread, Land, and Peace, as the political slogan of the day summarized it. They had not voted for a one-party dictatorship in their name; neither had they voted for the construction of socialism or for the destruction of independent trade unions. The honeymoon between the Bolsheviks and the workers was rather short, and already in the spring of 1918 the Mensheviks began to recover lost ground. Their strategy under the new center-left party leadership of Iulii Martov and Fedor Dan was to expose the utopian (from their point of view) and destructive economic policy of the Bolsheviks, which was going to hurt the workers and lead to a total collapse of industry. The Mensheviks and SRs chose a course of a peaceful competition with the Bolsheviks in the soviets, the same strategy that the Bolsheviks themselves had pursued in 1917.

The Constitutional Democrats (Kadets in Russian abbreviation), or Russian liberals, and all the groups to the right of them were simply outlawed and disfranchized by the Bolsheviks. With the disbandment of the Constituent Assembly they had no representation of any kind. They were made voiceless politically, and their property was confiscated or expropriated or made valueless by inflation and the seizure of the banks. The Kadets and the army officers were ready at that stage to resist the Bolsheviks by force of arms, but they did not have any. They too had to wait for an opportune moment.

Prospects looked good for the Bolsheviks in January–February 1918. Their gamble of seizing the capital in October seemed to have worked. They had overcome the hurdle of the Constituent Assembly successfully, since no force seemed to be on the horizon that could topple or even challenge their supremacy. The situation began to change in the spring of 1918. The danger came not from any organized political party or movement but from the Bolsheviks' own October constituency of workers, soldiers, and peasants. Social and political processes in the spring of 1918 undermined this ad hoc coalition and brought the Bolshevik government to the brink of disaster in the summer.

In the cities the Bolsheviks' problem was that economic conditions kept getting worse, whereas political expectations were very high. Clearly the disintegration of Russian industry had started back in February 1917. Inflated war production was bound to collapse at some point, especially as Russia withdrew from the war. Clearly, high unemployment was going to weaken the appeal of the government, any government, in Russia. Yet the Bolsheviks launched a number of radical policies which they described as "the Red Guards' attack on capitalism," and that made the economic situation worse than it had already been. The Bolsheviks behaved as if their chief priority was to shake the foundations of the capitalist international and social order rather than engage in a search for constructive solutions. Their first acts were, so to say, for the record, so that if and when they fell, the whole world would know what the first proletarian dictatorship was all about.

The Bolsheviks were primarily interested not in improving economic conditions but in a "socialist" revolution. They introduced workers' control at the factories, which was supposed to resolve all problems because, they insisted, it was the capitalists who had sabotaged production. In reality, workers' control resulted in mismanagement, parochialism, and chaos in industry. To make things worse, the Bolsheviks "nationalized" the banks, better to say seized them, in December 1917.²³ As a result money lost all value. Credit stopped, inflation soared, and one plant after another went bankrupt and shut down. Initially the Bolsheviks did not mind the bankruptcies, because they hurt the capitalists; they willingly nationalized (i.e., took under state protection) one plant after the other. The workers craved protection, and they believed that the proletarian state would not let them down. Alas, the more industry was nationalized, the less the Bolsheviks were capable of sustaining it by government subsidies.

As early as January 1918 massive unemployment hit Petrograd and other big cities. The workers began to grumble, reminding the Bolsheviks of their October promises. The Mensheviks saw their chance and opened a vigorous campaign against the Bolshevik "quasi-socialist experiments," as they put it. They stood for a mixed economy, partial denationalization, and a partnership of

²³ For a timid glasnost-era criticism of the "seizure of the banks," see V. V. Zhuravlev, "Kavaleriiskaia ataka na kapital. Priobreteniia i poteri," *Voprosy Istorii KPSS*, no. 4 (1991), 33–46.

trade unions, factory owners and the state—that is, the system of 1917. The Bolsheviks perceived these appeals as a betrayal of socialism and the Mensheviks as agents of the bourgeoisie among the workers. Yet the Menshevik message was popular now, and they began winning one city soviet election after another in major industrial centers. In most cases they formed an electoral bloc with the SRs, and the two parties were well on the road to recovering majorities in major urban centers, which they had lost to the Bolsheviks in September–October 1917. If this process had not been disrupted by violence, the Bolshevik seizure of power in the fall of 1917 would have appeared as a temporary success due to the appeal of radical solutions, which collapsed when it became evident that they did not work.

To make things worse for the Bolsheviks, the Left SRs and the mainstream SRs were doing very well in the provincial soviet elections in the countryside. The Left SRs had split from the mainstream SRs in October 1917 because they believed then that the SR party had stalled on the question of agrarian reform and the redistribution of land to the peasants. The Left SRs had become allies of the Bolsheviks, perceiving them as a party that would guarantee radical social revolution. Yet in the spring of 1918 the Left SRs discovered that the Bolsheviks had adopted a utilitarian approach toward peasants. It was going to be a proletarian dictatorship over all others, including the peasants. The norms of representation in the soviets favored workers' votes over those of peasants. The rift between the Left SRs and the Bolsheviks began to widen over the Brest-Litovsk separate peace treaty with Germany, which the Left SRs perceived as capitulation to German imperialism. Before too long the rift exploded into an open confrontation.

While losing the support of urban workers, the Bolsheviks did not fare better with their main constituency of October, the soldiers. The army simply melted away; it ceased to exist. Soldiers, most of them former peasants, returned to their villages and were gradually reabsorbed into the peasant community. The trajectory of peasant political attitudes was somewhat different from that of workers. The workers felt the aftereffects of the "socialist" revolution very quickly and reacted accordingly. The peasants, on the other hand, were quite content in the spring of 1918. They had divided up the land, and they were not interested in national politics anymore. As far as they were concerned, the city folks could argue, but they had gotten what they wanted. At first the withdrawal of the peasants from national politics hurt the SRs most, since the peasants did not rise to defend the Constituent Assembly. But it is far more important that their withdrawal hurt the Bolsheviks as well, perhaps ultimately more than the SRs. The peasants were not against the Bolsheviks as a political party yet, but they were traditionally suspicious of any government. Now that the Bolsheviks were the government, the peasants adopted a defensive posture in regard to their land and their grain.

The Bolsheviks needed grain to provide subsidies to the army and the cities,

but they could not get it because the peasants were not willing to sell. And they were not willing to sell because the ruble was losing value with every passing day, partly, one might add, due to the Bolsheviks' attack on capitalism and the market economy as such. So the Bolsheviks had to devise some method of getting grain and other food supplies from the recalcitrant peasants. The Mensheviks and SRs argued in the Parliament (Central Executive Committee of Soviets, CEC) that the only way to do it was to restore the market mechanism, restore peasant trust in money, and raise fixed state prices on agricultural products. In fact, some moderate Bolsheviks defended policies along the same lines as well. But Lenin must have come to the conclusion that such a course was suicidal for the Bolsheviks politically, even though it made perfect sense economically. If the market mechanism were restored and credit and commerce reappeared, who would benefit? The answer was unambiguous: certainly the well-off peasants, those who had voted for the SRs, the Bolsheviks' main rivals. Capitalism would lead to the economic and political recovery of the countryside and of the SRs, and that was unacceptable to the Bolsheviks. They had to find a way to feed the army and the cities without aiding the rich and the SRs. Political considerations certainly were the key to Bolshevik policy choices.²⁴

In May 1918 the Bolsheviks decided to form detachments of dedicated workers, arm them, and send them to the countryside to collect grain by force. To aid these proletarian troops, the Bolsheviks devised a plan to divide the peasant community into warring factions. They were going to form committees of the poor, which would get a share if they helped the workers' detachments to expropriate rich peasants' grain. This social policy of divide and rule was supposed to kill two birds with one stone: get the grain and create a social constituency of support for the Bolsheviks in the countryside.²⁵ It made perfect sense as far as the interests of the Bolshevik party were concerned. But the price was high. In practical terms it meant a civil war in the countryside: Bolshevik detachments and their supporters in local communities versus the bulk of the peasantry.

As soon as the contours of Bolshevik policy became apparent, the Left SRs turned from loyal and friendly critics of the Bolsheviks into irreconcilable enemies. The Left SRs and the SRs were going to do their utmost to organize peasant resistance. So by June 1918 the ad hoc coalition of social forces that had propelled the Bolsheviks to power in October disintegrated. The Mensheviks, the SRs, and the Left SRs were the main beneficiaries of the crisis of Bolshevism, but they were far from united in their vision of what had to be done next.

During the spring of 1918 the Bolsheviks claimed that the legitimacy of their

²⁴ I discussed this issue in greater detail in "Politics Not Economics Was the Key," *Slavic Review*, vol. 44, no. 2 (1985), 244–50.

²⁵ For a critical post-Communist appraisal of this policy in Russia, see Kuleshov, ed., *Nashe Otechestvo*, vol. 2, pp. 50–53.

government was based on the will of freely elected soviets of workers', peasants', and soldiers' deputies. They claimed that since they, the Bolsheviks, had received a majority at the Second Congress of Soviets in October, they had formed a legitimate government regardless of the Constituent Assembly, which was a bourgeois institution and a holdover from the old regime. The logic of this reasoning was that the soviets were the repository of national sovereignty and that Soviet democracy was superior to bourgeois democracy because it was a democracy of workers, peasants, and soldiers excluding the parasitic classes of society, such as capitalists, landlords, and the clergy as well as officers, professors, doctors, lawyers, and other bourgeois elements. Bolshevik leaders kept repeating during the spring of 1918 that whichever party won the majority of soviets would automatically have a majority at the Congress of Soviets, a supreme legislative institution, and would be able to form the next Soviet government. It is important that at this date the Bolsheviks defined their government as a democracy in principle. The ideology that Russia was to be led by a vanguard of the proletariat regardless of popular vote because scientific laws of human development ordained the Communist party to fulfill the mission of socialist construction—this ideology was not yet made public.

When the Bolsheviks realized that the election returns to the provincial soviets might leave them in a minority nationwide, they faced a dilemma: power or principle. To hold on to power they had to start disbanding, not just the "bourgeois" Constituent Assembly, but the soviets as well. Staying faithful to the principle of Soviet power, on the other hand, would mean in practice that the Mensheviks and SRs would gain a majority as in 1917, and the October gamble of seizing power would be for nothing. Yet if it was possible to disband workers' soviets in a proletarian state, some Bolsheviks wondered, where would the cycle of violence lead? Would the institutions of repression become a state within a state? Would it be impossible to establish a rule of law of any kind? Would the Communist party itself turn into a privileged and uncontrollable elite? It is to the credit of the Bolsheviks that there still were people in their ranks who were concerned with these issues and had the courage to express their views publicly.

In each and every case, however, when the Mensheviks and SRs won elections to the soviets, these were disbanded by force, or the opposition parties were expelled from the soviets.²⁶ This amounted to a coup d'état by the Bolsheviks against the system of soviets as institutions of popular sovereignty. Now the Bolsheviks revealed themselves as a party willing to violate their own constitution: they betrayed the principles they had pledged allegiance to only a few months earlier. On June 14 the Bolsheviks finalized this creeping coup d'état by officially expelling from the CEC the opposition parties of the Mensheviks

²⁶ For a detailed discussion, see Brovkin, *The Mensheviks after October*, chapter 5, "The Elections to the City Soviets," pp. 126–61.

and SRs. By law they had no authority for this act, since only the Congress of Soviets had the right to change the composition of its Central Executive Committee. From this point onward the Soviet government was nothing but an instrument in the hands of the Communist party dictatorship. The distinction between the two ceased to exist.

By June 1918 Russia was sliding into chaos and civil war. It was a different kind of chaos than in the fall of 1917. No longer was it directed against the propertied classes of the old regime. Now the Bolshevik government and its agents were quickly turning into an enemy of many groups in the population. Like tremors before an earthquake, more and more peasant rebellions began to break out. These were propelled by an ever increasing peasant resistance to grain requisitioning and committees of the poor. The arrival of grain requisition detachments in the countryside usually led to armed clashes. Church bells rang, and angry peasants assembled in village squares and often attacked the detachments. The Bolsheviks responded with reprisals and by taking hostages, and the cycle of violence intensified with every passing week. In many small towns the soviets were attacked, and in some the Bolsheviks were locked in a soviet building and burned alive.²⁷

In the cities a wave of strikes escalated to general strikes and uprisings, this time against the Bolsheviks.²⁸ They responded by banning public gatherings, arresting Mensheviks and SRs, and disbanding independent trade unions. Some plants, deemed hotbeds of opposition, were shut down altogether, all workers fired and exiled to faraway provinces. The workers' protest movement was coordinated by a new organization, a council of workers' plenipotentiaries (*upolnomochennye*) led by the Mensheviks. These were particularly strong in Russia's oldest and biggest industrial cities: Petrograd, Tula, Izhevsk, Sormovo, and Kolomna. Metalworkers, railway workers, and printers were the leaders of this movement. Their main political slogans called for free elections to the soviets, independent trade unions, and the right to strike, and denounced the one-party Communist dictatorship. The Bolsheviks responded by arresting the leaders of the plenipotentiaries movement and with wholesale arrests of the Menshevik and SR party leaders. All their newspapers had been shut down by midsummer 1918 in Soviet Russia.

The expulsion of the opposition parties from the CEC had a profound effect on the SR party. The center-left course of Victor Chernov, who had advocated peaceful competition with the Bolsheviks in the soviets, was now in shambles. The Bolsheviks had disbanded not only the Constituent Assembly but the soviets as well. Combined with the attack on peasants, Bolshevik policies

²⁷ "Pogrom Soveta v Pavlovskom Posade," *Delo naroda* (15 May 1918), 2, reprinted in English in Brovkin, *The Mensheviks after October*, p. 259.

²⁸ William Rosenberg, "Russian Labor and Soviet Power after October," *Slavic Review*, vol. 44, no. 2 (1985), pp. 213–39.

generated a desire among the SRs to fight back. Those among the SRs who had advocated a resolute armed struggle against the Bolsheviks were gaining the upper hand in the SR party. Throughout April and May these SRs were contemplating where and how they would start armed struggle against the Bolsheviks.²⁹ They were planning to raise an armed insurrection in the agricultural provinces along the Volga, where their organizations had been traditionally strong and where they had won handsomely in the elections to the Constituent Assembly.

If in October 1917 a fortunate combination of circumstances favored the Bolsheviks' bid for power, now in June 1918 sheer luck was on the side of the SRs. Leon Trotsky made one of his greatest blunders, which changed the constellation of forces virtually overnight. He ordered that the Czechoslovak Legion in Russia be disarmed. Partly this order was issued to comply with the demands of the Germans, who feared the presence of well-organized armed force hostile to Germany on Russian soil. The Czechs had wound up in Russia as prisoners of war because they were subjects of the Austrian monarchy. Since, however, their true loyalty was not to Austria but to a future independent Czechoslovakia, they were treated in Russia not as enemy POWs but as allies against Austria and Germany. The Czech Legion was thus formed in Russia as a part of the Allied forces against the Central Powers. As long as Russia remained an Allied power, the Czech Legion did not represent any danger to a Russian government. Yet when the Bolsheviks concluded a separate peace treaty with Germany, the status of the Czech Legion became more ambiguous. The treaty certainly strengthened the Central Powers and undermined the supreme goal of the Czechs to form an independent Czechoslovak state. Thus the Bolsheviks were perceived by the Czechs as having betrayed the Allies and the cause of Czechoslovak national liberation. That is why, when Trotsky ordered that the Czechoslovak Legion be disarmed, it had no choice but to resist.

The Czechs disarmed the Bolsheviks instead and seized power in the provincial town of Samara on the Volga. They desperately needed Russian allies who would oppose the Brest-Litovsk treaty, oppose the Germans, and oppose the Bolsheviks. The local SRs quickly realized that this was their chance. Six elected members of the disbanded Constituent Assembly who happened to be in Samara formed the Committee of the Constituent Assembly (Komuch), whose goal was proclaimed to be armed struggle against the Bolsheviks for reconvoation of the Constituent Assembly, restoration of legitimate government in Russia, and cancellation of the Brest-Litovsk peace treaty. This was the beginning of the frontline civil war.

During June and July the Komuch government established its authority with

²⁹ I. Brushvit, "Kak podgotovialos' Volzhskoe vystuplenie," *Volia Rossii*, no. 10 (1928).

astonishing speed in one province after another along the Volga. By mid-August, in the immense territory from the Volga River to the Pacific Ocean, the Bolsheviks were overthrown. The Komuch government in Samara controlled the territory between the Volga and the Urals, and the Siberian government in which the Right SRs took part controlled the territory from the Urals to the ocean. Upon hearing the news that the Committee of the Constituent Assembly in Samara was spreading its authority, the workers at munitions works in Izhevsk and Votkinsk in Vyatka Province rose in rebellion, overthrew the local Bolsheviks, and reconvened the soviet which the Bolsheviks had disbanded in June after they had lost the elections. The Izhevsk soviet pledged loyalty to Komuch and mobilized armed workers to fight the Bolsheviks as a part of the newly formed People's Army. These thirty thousand workers, well armed with rifles they had manufactured, proved to be the most dedicated fighters against the Bolsheviks. The success of the Czech and Komuch forces on the Volga and in Siberia prompted a more vigorous involvement of the Allies. The Czechs could not be left to fight alone, so limited contingents of British and American forces arrived in Vladivostok and Arkhangelsk to protect the trans-Siberian railroad and render aid to the Czechs.

The Bolsheviks in Moscow were in panic. They gave secret orders to their Urals comrades to execute the entire imperial family lest they be liberated by the Czechs and SRs.³⁰ One disaster after another hit the Bolsheviks in those stormy days of July and early August 1918. The most serious of them was the so-called uprising of the Left SRs on 6 July. For many decades the official Bolshevik version of events stood unchallenged, that the Left SRs in Moscow murdered the German ambassador, Count Wilhelm von Mirbach, in order to wreck the Brest-Litovsk peace treaty, launch an uprising against the Bolsheviks, and seize power. Yet recent research into this affair casts some doubt on the official version.³¹ It is not certain whether Ia. G. Bliumkin killed the German ambassador in his capacity as a member of the Left SR party or as an agent of the Cheka (Lenin's political police). It seems plausible that the Left SR Central Committee was tricked into accepting responsibility for the murder and that the Bolsheviks used this opportunity to turn the tables on their former allies. It was a dangerous moment for the Bolsheviks. The Fifth Congress of Soviets was in session in Moscow—the congress which had been elected without the participation of the Mensheviks and SRs, who had been expelled from the soviets earlier. Even without the help of other opposition parties, the Left SRs did exceptionally well against the Bolsheviks. They had about a third of the elected delegates, even with the unfair norms of representation which heavily favored the urban bureaucracies. In a one-man, one-vote contest the Left SRs might

³⁰ Pipes, *The Russian Revolution*, pp. 745–89.

³¹ Fel'shtinsky, *Bolsheviki i levye Esery*.

well have won a majority against the Bolsheviks thanks to their overwhelming rural preponderance. The Bolsheviks used the Mirbach murder to provoke Left SR defiance and then expelled them from the Congress of Soviets. Hundreds of delegates to the so-called supreme legislative institution were arrested as culprits in a supposed rebellion against Soviet power, even though they knew nothing of it. All over Russia the Left SRs, who had no knowledge of what had transpired in Moscow, were arrested and expelled from the local soviets as well. The Bolsheviks thus completed their own coup d'état against Soviet power.

In addition to the fighting with the Left SRs in Moscow, an uprising broke out in Yaroslavl. This was a genuine uprising well prepared by Boris Savinkov.³² He used to be an SR terrorist before the war, but in 1917 his reputation was that of a right-wing SR well connected to the officers. He was expelled from the SR party for his role in the Kornilov affair in August 1917. Savinkov counted on Allied help arriving from Arkhangelsk, which would enable him, he hoped, to seize Moscow. Help never arrived. For two weeks fierce fighting for Yaroslavl went on in which some detachments of workers fought against the Bolsheviks.

The most serious blow the Bolsheviks suffered that summer, however, was the capture of Kazan by the Czech and SR forces on 8 August. The Komuch government seized the entire gold reserve of the Russian Empire, which had been stored in Kazan. Strategically the capture of Kazan opened the way to Nizhni Novgorod, the last major city on the Volga still in Bolshevik hands, and then to Yaroslavl and Moscow itself. It did appear at that moment that the tide would consume the Bolsheviks and that the Komuch government would reconvene the Constituent Assembly in Moscow.

The Bolsheviks responded to this challenge with utmost vigor and determination. Trotsky personally commanded the meager troops at the Bolsheviks' disposal. All they could come up with in those days was a Red Army of twenty thousand, thrown into battle at a critical juncture to defend Nizhni Novgorod. The Bolsheviks knew they had to win or die. If Moscow had been captured by the pro-Allied forces, the Germans would probably have occupied Petrograd and parts of western Russia, and the Bolshevik party would have disappeared. In this desperate situation the Bolsheviks launched a policy of Red Terror. They set up concentration camps for enemies of the proletarian revolution, "where suspicious agitators, counterrevolutionary officers, saboteurs, and speculators would be placed except those who will be shot on the spot."³³ Hundreds and thousands of executions were carried out all over Russia in September. The Cheka was empowered to act without restraint and, in essence, without any legal procedures. Workers who refused to work were arrested and drafted into

³² Spence, *Boris Savinkov*, pp. 208–12.

³³ "Prikaz Narkoma po Voennym Delam" (An order of the war affairs people's commissar), *Izvestiia Petrogradskogo Gorodskogo Obshchestvennogo Samoupravleniia* (17 August 1918), 1.

the Red Army; peasants who refused to surrender grain were shot as kulaks and counterrevolutionaries; soldiers who refused to fight were shot as traitors and deserters. In some cases entire regiments were shot. Those who dared to speak out against the rule of terror were arrested and shot, many SRs among them. These ruthless measures worked. Confronting fierce resistance, the SR People's Army retreated. Nizhni Novgorod was safe for Soviet power and Red Terror. The advancing Reds pursued the Czech and SR units, and before too long Kazan was recaptured. In September Samara itself, the capital of the territory of the Constituent Assembly, fell to the Reds.

The Red Terror had a profound psychological effect on the Bolshevik party. All moral restraints were now cast aside. Anything was permissible in order to stay in power. Few were concerned then that the institutions of mass reprisals were there to stay and that arbitrary terror directed indiscriminately against others would one day consume the Bolshevik party itself.

Nineteen eighteen was the year the Russian state disintegrated and regional governments emerged on the ruins of the collapsed empire. It was a period when both the Committee of the Constituent Assembly in Samara and the Bolsheviks in Moscow claimed to control territory, but in fact most of their claims were on paper only. The frontline battles between the nascent Red Army and the troops of the Constituent Assembly in the summer involved tens of thousands of soldiers rather than hundreds of thousands, as happened a year later against the Whites. In this pivotal year, the Bolshevik government was entirely at the mercy of the Germans. It was close to collapse several times due to the dynamic opposition of the Mensheviks, the Socialist Revolutionaries, and the Left SRs. The frontline civil war during this first stage was primarily between the Communists and socialists. To be sure, there were a few regiments of officers in outlying areas, but the Whites did not exist as a contender for political power in 1918.

In November 1918 the stage of the civil war which involved the Bolsheviks and the Committee of the Constituent Assembly, allied with the Czech Legion in Siberia, was finally over. Admiral Aleksandr Kolchak, who held the post of war minister in a coalition government in Siberia, staged a coup d'état, disbanded the Committee of the Constituent Assembly, and proclaimed himself the supreme ruler of Russia. Overnight the constellation of political forces changed in Russia once again. A military regime of army officers (the Whites) emerged as a factor of supreme importance in the struggle for power. The socialists were relegated to the role of an oppressed opposition, both on the Red- and White-controlled territory.

Thus the major parameters of military struggle were set in the fall of 1918 that defined the politics of the civil war for the next three years. On the international arena the world war was finally over. For Russia this meant the end of the German occupation of Ukraine and a possible vigorous involvement

of the Allies in Russian affairs. On the domestic front it was going to be a struggle of the Reds against the Whites, and a war of both against Ukrainians and other "separatists" and the socialists. And soon a new factor appeared in national politics which was only marginally present in 1918: the Green movement of peasants. The most important and indeed decisive stage in the Russian civil war was just beginning.

Part One

1918-1919

The “New Course” That Failed (December 1918–April 1919)

IN NOVEMBER 1918, when the worst excesses of local Chekas reached their apogee, Lenin's government abruptly changed its policies. The Decree of 14 June, which had expelled the Mensheviks and SRs from the CEC, was annulled.¹ It was legitimate again for the Socialist Revolutionaries and the Social Democrats to run in elections to the soviets, open clubs, and speak at workers' rallies. It seemed, at least for the moment, that extraordinary rule was out of favor and that an attempt was going to be made to return to the status of the spring of 1918—a multiparty electoral system with free campaigning and an independent press. Was this shift in policy merely a maneuver made for propaganda purposes, or was it a genuine attempt to find an alternative to the extraordinary rule of Red Terror, “seriously and for a long time”—as Lenin described his hopes when introducing the NEP in 1921? Why was moderation abandoned once again in April 1919? Grain requisitioning, mass arrests of socialists, and Red Terror resumed. Did Lenin change his mind, or was his new policy sabotaged by the Communist party? Or was he, perhaps, forced by other circumstances to postpone the moderate policies he had tried once before, and to sanction what is now known as War Communism?

Causes of Legalization

Officially the Bolshevik government explained its decision to legalize the Menshevik party as a response to the Mensheviks' more conciliatory posture toward the Soviet government. Indeed, in October and November 1918 the Mensheviks made a number of statements to the Bolsheviks' liking. They condemned the Allied intervention in Russia in strong terms. They forbade party members to take part in any uprisings or armed struggle against the soviets, and they recognized the Soviet Constitution of July 1918. Restoration of the Constituent Assembly and of a parliamentary republic based on universal suffrage was declared to be a long-term goal of the Mensheviks, but for the moment they saw their task as restoring the rule of the multiparty, freely elected soviets,

¹ For the text of the decree, see “Postanovlenie TsIK,” *Vlast' Sovetov*, No. 29 (27 December 1918), 20, and “O Men'shevikakh,” *Izvestiia TsIK* (1 December 1918).

which had been replaced by appointed commissars and by the Cheka. Menshevik conciliatory pronouncements had been made earlier as well, but they had not led then to a softening of Bolshevik policy toward the opposition parties. On the contrary, the second half of 1918 was a period of mounting attack on the Mensheviks and SRs which reached a crescendo during the official Red Terror of September–October 1918. Why, then, at the end of 1918 this sudden change of policy? The real reasons lay elsewhere: in Lenin's new foreign and domestic policy objectives.

The defeat of Germany in World War I, the withdrawal of German troops from Ukraine and the Baltic states, and on top of it all the German revolution changed the international environment profoundly for Soviet Russia by the end of 1918. The German Social Democrats were propelled to power in Berlin. Having waited patiently for the spread of revolution to Europe, the Bolsheviks in Moscow were ecstatic over the developments in Germany and Austria. The rise of the soviets there made them hope that the long-awaited revolution in Germany had finally arrived. The rise of socialism in Western Europe would ease Soviet Russia's international position and complicate the Allies' plans to crush the Soviet regime. For the time being the Bolsheviks were interested in cultivating good relations with German Social Democrats.

Since Russian Mensheviks (officially, Social Democrats) were well known in Europe from the days before the war, it was somewhat embarrassing for Lenin that Menshevik Central Committee members were being held in prison. In fact, Karl Radek, a key link between the German Social Democrats and Russian Communists, argued in the CEC that it was imperative to annul the Mensheviks' expulsion from the CEC.² Moreover, German Social Democrats wrote letters asking Lenin to free Russian Social Democrats from prisons.³ The European press had covered the Bolshevik Red Terror extensively, and the Bolsheviks' reputation in Europe was tarnished. It was a convenient moment to soften this negative image by providing concrete evidence that the opposition socialist parties were legal in Russia and that the Red Terror was directed against "counterrevolutionaries" only.

The Mensheviks' support for the Soviet government against Allied intervention was also useful. The socialist and labor parties in the Allied countries had to be encouraged to intensify their opposition to intervention in Russia. The Bolsheviks were seriously worried about the Allies' intentions, now that the war was over, and they feared that the huge inventories of war matériel the Allies had accumulated could be channeled to the Whites. Concrete evidence that all of Russia's workers' parties were united against the Whites would be useful in generating public-opinion pressure in the Allied countries against intervention.

The second major cause of the New Course, as far as the external situation

² L. Martov, "Novyi Kurs v Sovetskoi Rossii," *Mysl'*, no. 1–2 (February 1919), 11.

³ *Ibid.*

was concerned, was the turn of events in the east of the country. On 18 November 1918 Admiral Kolchak overthrew the multiparty government in Siberia, in which the SRs had played a leading role, and established an undisguised military dictatorship. He started his rule by executing socialists and disbanding the elected city councils, the dumas. For some Communists, the threat posed by the Whites made it necessary to use the socialists, if they were willing, in a joint struggle against the Whites. Others were interested in broadening the political base of the Soviet regime by reaching an honest agreement with the socialists (Mensheviks and SRs), within the framework of the Soviet Constitution. These views were expressed most articulately by a group of Siberian Communists in a letter to Lenin:

All workers and revolutionaries who remained alive, and all those supporters of the republic express only one wish: the speediest possible conclusion of an agreement with the socialist and pro-republic groupings on the platform of political compromise—Power to the People [as opposed to dictatorship of the proletariat] because if the hostility between the soviets and these groupings continues, it would end with the destruction of the working class.⁴

In other words the consolidation of the White forces in Siberia under Kolchak represented such a grave danger that Communists needed the socialists against a common foe.

Aside from practical considerations dictated by the exigencies of the civil war and Allied intervention, some Communists advocated toleration of legal opposition parties as a matter of principle. One of the most outspoken proponents of this was N. Osinsky, one of the leaders of the Moscow party organization: "We must say clearly and definitively: that at the given stage of development there is no need at all to remove from the soviets and from free discussion political parties that do not advocate overthrow of Soviet power. . . . freedom of the press and assembly for petit bourgeois parties represented in the soviets is possible and necessary."⁵ Osinsky's advocacy of a new policy stemmed not out of his sympathy for the Mensheviks and SRs but out of his concern for the development of the Soviet regime. Something had gone wrong in 1918. The revolution was supposed to liberate the working class. Instead workers were powerless vis-à-vis the appointed commissars. It was necessary to restore the accountability of the soviets to the electorate and the accountability of the Communist party to the soviets. Extraordinary measures had to be abolished. Power had to be vested in properly elected soviets, and the Cheka had to be subordinated to the courts.

⁴ Fedor Dan published excerpts from this letter in "Poka ne pozdno," *Vsegda Vpered*, no. 4 (11 February 1919), 2. Also see Spirin, *Klassy i partii*, p. 361.

⁵ N. Osinsky, "Novye zadachi stroitel'stva Sovetskoi respubliki," *Vlast' Sovetov*, no. 2 (February 1919), 7–17, and "Raboche-krestianskoe obshchestvennoe mnenie i melkoburzhuznye partii," *Pravda* (15 January 1919), 3.

In 1918 the Mensheviks had been arguing along the same lines and were labeled counterrevolutionaries for it. Now, in early 1919, a part of the Communist party shared these same views. This was partly so because local Communist organizations felt threatened by the power of the local Chekas. The journal of the executive committees of soviets launched an aggressive campaign against the prerogatives of the Cheka. The local Chekas, not the soviets, were the true masters in the provinces. They could shoot anyone "with a report afterward." In some places, the Menshevik leader Martov wrote, they even executed Communists.⁶

The most important cause of the New Course was a movement within the Communist party itself for a revival of the soviets and for curbing Cheka lawlessness. These Communists saw the restoration of the Mensheviks' and SRs' right to be elected to the soviets as the restoration of responsible local government. What Osinsky implied in his articles was that the existence of opposition parties within the system of soviets would be a positive development. Opposition parties would act as a check on the arbitrariness so prevalent in the provinces. Victor Nogin, of the Moscow party organization, echoed these sentiments at the Eighth CP Congress in Moscow in March 1919: "We received such a countless number of horrifying facts about drunkenness, debauchery [*razgui*], bribery, brigandage [*razboi*], and senseless actions on the part of many functionaries that hair stood on end [*volosy stanovilis' dybom*]." ⁷ Other speakers admitted that the soviets had simply been liquidated in the provinces, "even though it was against the Constitution." Osinsky was even more explicit. He spoke of the rise of patronage cliques, a bureaucratic hierarchy, and arbitrary rule over people "with special instructions [from the center]." ⁸ In fact, he said, local officials were not accountable to anyone. V. A. Avanesov, a high-ranking official in the CEC, continued in the same vein: "in the localities, military commanders and executive committees commit such disgraceful and shocking things about which I could have talked for a long time." ⁹ But he did not. Nevertheless, the general picture of the situation in the provinces emerging from the speeches of some Bolshevik leaders left no doubt that Soviet power had degenerated into a rule of patronage cliques, accountable to no one.

Something had to be done to restore order in the provinces. For the moment, concerned Communists saw the solution in restoration of the rule of law. They clamored for more glasnost, fair elections, and accountability of local officials. In the context of 1919 they even dared to defend the idea of a legal opposition party.

⁶ L. [lu.] Martov, "Novyi Kurs v Sovetskoi Rossii," *Mysl'*, no. 1-2 (February 1919), 9-14, and "Changement de Tactique du Gouvernement Soviétique," *La République Russe*, no. 5 (3 May 1919), 4.

⁷ *Vos'moi S'ezd RKP(b)*, p. 169.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 188.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 206.

Legalization of the Opposition Parties

Due to the aforementioned factors of domestic and foreign policy, a number of concrete measures for legalizing opposition parties were adopted. In addition to the CEC decree Raphael Abramovich, a Menshevik CC member, and other Mensheviks were released from prisons.¹⁰ Social Democrats could now run in elections to the soviets and trade unions. They were allowed to reopen their clubs and offices. For the first time since August 1918 the Mensheviks were able to speak freely at workers' rallies. Finally they received a permit to resume publication of their newspaper, *Vsegda Vpered*, which had been shut down since May 1918. The first issue came out in January 1919. Within two weeks the paper reached a circulation of 100,000 and even that was not enough to satisfy demand.¹¹ People from other cities traveled to Moscow to obtain a copy of the opposition paper. The editorial board would have been happy to increase circulation, but the Bolshevik authorities had limited the supply of paper available to the only uncensored publication in Soviet Russia.¹²

Even though the CEC resolution had the force of law, local officials and the Cheka sabotaged its implementation almost everywhere. In its internal circular the Cheka instructed its local branches to let the socialists work, in view of the legalization decree, but added that it was imperative to "establish the strictest covert surveillance over them."¹³ Local Communist authorities were in no hurry to allow the legal existence of opposition parties. In Petrograd the city EC allowed the Mensheviks to organize a public rally, and it was even willing to consider granting a permit for publication of a newspaper, "depending on the outcome of the elections to the soviet."¹⁴ In other words if elections did not turn out favorably for the Communists, the opposition paper in Petrograd could not be tolerated.

In Kostroma local Communists wrote to their CC that in view of the anti-Communist attitudes of the population they would not legalize the Menshevik party. In Kozlov Township of Tambov Province the Social Democrats received the following reply to their application for legalization: "In view of the fact that the SD party in the Kozlov *uezd* [administrative district] has not sufficiently proved its loyalty to Soviet power and in its current composition is deemed dangerous for the orderly work of the soviet, the EC rejects the legalization application."¹⁵ Strictly speaking this was a violation of the law, since

¹⁰ For the list of Mensheviks released from prisons, see "Osvobozhdenie iz tiur'my," *Utro Moskvy*, no. 21 (4 November 1918).

¹¹ "A Letter from Russia" (19 February 1919), Axelrod Archive, series 16, folder 18.

¹² "Bumaga dlia *Vsegda Vpered*," *Vsegda Vpered*, no. 6 (14 February 1919), 2.

¹³ "Prikaz No. 113 VeCheKa mestnym chrezvychainym kommissiiam ob izmenenii i uluchshenii ikh raboty" (19 December 1918), document 191, in Belov, ed., *Iz istorii Vserossiiskoi chrezvychainoi kommissii* (hereinafter *Iz istorii Vecheka*), pp. 236–37.

¹⁴ Gogolevskii, *Petrogradskii Sovet*, p. 167.

¹⁵ "K initsiativnoi gruppe SD goroda Kozlova," *Vsegda Vpered* (25 February 1919), 2.

the CEC did not leave it up to the local authorities to decide whether to legalize the Mensheviks or not. What mattered in Russia, both then and now, was not the letter of the law but the ability of Moscow to enforce its policy. Since the Bolshevik leadership was divided over the legalization of opposition, conflicting signals came down to the provinces, and local authorities chose to act in the way that best suited them. Of all the provincial capitals, only in Tula did Soviet authorities grant the opposition complete freedom to campaign during elections to the soviet, but they did not permit the local Menshevik newspaper to resume publication.¹⁶ In most provincial cities local authorities banned the sale of and subscription to *Vsegda Vpered*, even though it was legally circulating in Moscow. In Orel local Communists arrested a correspondent of *Vsegda Vpered* for "meddling in their affairs."¹⁷ Bolsheviks in Rybinsk, Yaroslavl Province, explained to the Bolshevik CC why they decided not to allow a Menshevik newspaper: "In connection with the legalization of the Mensheviks, they applied to the EC for a publication permit to reopen their newspaper. But the EC decided against it because popular attitudes in Rybinsk are not favorable to Soviet power."¹⁸

In the first three months of 1919 the Mensheviks were actually legal in the full sense only in Moscow. A small Menshevik faction was restored to membership in the supreme legislative institution, the CEC. The Mensheviks were also represented on the boards of many trade unions and recaptured the leadership of the Printers' Union. They were able to publish their paper, open several workers' clubs, and defend their point of view at workers' rallies. In Petrograd, Tula, and Bryansk, large centers of the metal industry, they were also elected to local soviets but were not permitted to publish their own newspapers. In Bryansk the Mensheviks were even admitted to the managerial board of the local plant since they had, as a local Communist put it: "an overwhelming majority over the Communists."¹⁹ Generally, at the local level, the Mensheviks managed to restore decimated organizations very quickly. Even if barred from the soviets, they were elected to scores of factory committees, workers' mutual aid fund boards, trade unions, cooperatives, and workshop committees on the factory floor.

At every step in their activity, though, the Mensheviks encountered increasing difficulties. In violation of the law, Menshevik delegates were simply not admitted to the National Board of the Metalworkers' Union.²⁰ When the Mensheviks won a majority in the Printers' Union, the Bolsheviks refused to comply with the new leadership and set up their own Red Printers' Union.²¹

¹⁶ Martov, "Novyi Kurs v Sovetskoi Rossii," *Mysl'*, no. 1-2 (February 1919), 12.

¹⁷ "Protest TsKa RSDRP," *Vsegda Vpered*, no. 13 (22 February 1919).

¹⁸ "Doklad Rybinskogo Uezdnoho Komiteta RKP(b)" (25 February-25 May 1919), document 584, *Perepiska Sekretariata*, vol. 7, p. 471.

¹⁹ G. Kirev, "Volki v ovech'ei shkure," *Izvestiia TsIK*, no. 103 (15 May 1919), 1.

²⁰ "Politika litsemeriia i trusosti," *Vsegda Vpered*, no. 4 (11 February 1919), 1.

²¹ M. S. Kefali, *Vsegda Vpered*, no. 5 (12 February 1919), 4.

Now they saw their task as "unmasking" the true counterrevolutionary nature of the Mensheviks. In other words when their power was threatened, especially through legitimate elections, local bureaucrats immediately turned into zealous guardians of the Communist cause. A hard line would guarantee their privileged and uncontested position, whereas the liberal line of toleration was a path full of pitfalls and dangers. No wonder the majority of Communist functionaries preferred the security of their jobs and privileges. The zigzags in Bolshevik policy toward the Mensheviks reflected an intense struggle within the Communist party over economic policy, first and foremost a policy toward the peasants, and over the structure of local government and the status of the Cheka. The legalization of opposition parties was closely intertwined with these issues.

Lenin and Martov

In early 1919 Iulii Martov, the leader of the Social Democrats, was cautiously optimistic about Lenin's New Course in Soviet Russia. Freedom of speech and freedom of the press seemed to be a reality at least in Moscow, and not only for Mensheviks. Mariia Spiridonova, the leader of the Left SRs, was released from prison and the Left SR party was legalized as well.²² Moreover negotiations began in Ufa with the Socialist Revolutionaries over legalization of their party.²³ These negotiations were conducted by Lev Kamenev with the aim of working out a compromise with the SRs, who had been condemned just a few weeks earlier as the worst enemies of Soviet Russia. Clearly these were promising changes.

As for economic policy, the notorious committees of the poor were abolished in December 1918. The policy of inciting class struggle in the countryside between the poor and the better-off peasants was now declared mistaken. The Bolshevik leaders publicly acknowledged now that squeezing grain from the countryside by requisition detachments had not justified their expectations. The search for a new policy toward the peasants was dictated first and foremost not by a change of heart but by the catastrophic food situation and by peasant rebellions. Even black market food supplies were running out in the big cities during the winter of 1918–19. Food prices skyrocketed. As a result workers', peasants', and Red Army soldiers' discontent was on the rise. According to Martov, peasant rebellions took place in Tver, Yaroslavl, Kostroma, Vladimir, Vitebsk, Kazan, Tula, Voronezh, Ryazan, Kaluga, Smolensk, and Tambov provinces at the end of 1918.²⁴ The Cheka chief, Martyn Latsis, counted more

²² "Le Parti Socialiste-Révolutionnaire de Gauche et les Bolcheviks," *La République Russe* (15 April 1919), 2.

²³ Spirin, *Klassy i partii*, p. 300–301.

²⁴ Martov, "Novyi Kurs v Sovetskoi Rossii," *Mysl'*, no. 1–2 (February 1919).

than a hundred peasant rebellions in the second half of 1918.²⁵ Diplomatic reports likewise spoke of "anti-Bolshevik peasant riots near Moscow, concluding, for example, that "the position of Soviet government is weaker than ever; they are losing their last support amongst the workmen in the large cities and the Red Army soldiers, to say nothing about the peasants."²⁶

The changes in economic policy Lenin embarked upon must have been a response to this explosive situation. What is significant, though, is that Lenin not only talked of pragmatic reasons for changing economic policy but also tried to define a theoretic basis for his New Course. In his numerous speeches in early 1919 he drummed his points over and over again, trying to convince his own party to change its handling of the peasants. The key theme of his speeches at that time was peace with the middle-income peasants. It was a mistake, he insisted, to attack middle-income peasants. Russia was a peasant country, and the Communists had to find a way of satisfying peasants' economic interests. Lenin must have startled his audience at the Eighth Congress of the CP when he went further than his usual admonitions and said that the October revolution was actually a peasant revolution.²⁷ Up to that point the October revolution had always been referred to as a proletarian revolution. And since everyone knew that peasants were petit bourgeois producers, by implication Lenin was saying that the October revolution was a petit bourgeois revolution. This was quite a departure from the party line.

Lenin explained that in October 1917 Russia was experiencing exceptional conditions. The Bolsheviks were simply fulfilling peasants' aspirations by adopting the SR program. He then went on to say that the revolution had remained bourgeois until June 1918: "Even in Russia capitalist enterprise lives, acts and develops, and generates new bourgeoisie, as in any other capitalist society."²⁸ Only after June 1918, according to Lenin's new conception, had the revolution become a socialist one, since only then did the workers and the poor peasants establish a dictatorship of the proletariat in the cities and in the countryside. The logical conclusion from Lenin's reasoning was that now, when the committees of the poor were abolished and when the party had to respect the economic interests of middle peasants, the revolution was no longer socialist. Lenin was calling for a "retreat" from socialist construction, just as he would in 1921. A retreat was necessary in the form of an accommodation with the peasants. Lenin warned his party not to push peasants too far and too fast, since this might lead to a catastrophe.

²⁵ Latsis [Janis Sudrabs, pseud.], *Dva goda bor'by na vnutrennem fronte*, p. 75.

²⁶ American Legation (Copenhagen), "Memorandum of the Conversation between Vice Consul J. A. Lehrs and Mr. Haxthansen, Danish Consul General at Moscow" (27 December 1918), Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of Russia and the Soviet Union, dispatch 861.00.3689, hereinafter referred to as Records.

²⁷ *Vos'moi S'ezd RKP(b)*, p. 102.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

Lenin's ideas of early 1919 clearly anticipated his decision to introduce the NEP two years later, in March 1921. Both then and in 1919 the new policy was called a "retreat." In 1921, after a number of peasant rebellions, workers' strikes, and most importantly the sailors' revolt in Kronstadt, Lenin managed to force his reluctant party to embark upon another "retreat." In 1919, however, the retreat into moderation did not last long. Part of Lenin's problem was that he chose to define his new policy in such a defeatist, and for many Communists humiliating, term as "retreat." Communist commanders did not like to retreat. They wanted to fight until the final victory, as they put it, over the world bourgeoisie. They did not want to make any concessions to petty traders, or to tolerate opposition parties. The question, however, is whether Lenin himself changed his mind by April 1919 and abandoned his "retreat" into moderation once again in favor of a new "offensive" against the "petite bourgeoisie and its parties," as the Mensheviks and SRs were called, or whether he was powerless to control the situation and his party because of new peasant uprisings, general strikes, the Green peasant deserters' movement, and offensives of the Whites.

Martov, just as much as other Mensheviks, was certainly pleased with the turnaround in Lenin's thinking. It was after all an admission that the Mensheviks had been right. They had been arguing all along that Russia was a peasant country and that it was impossible to coerce peasants into submission. In his articles, speeches, and editorials Martov continued his lifelong argument with Lenin. He welcomed the idea that a retreat be sounded now, but he also tried to convince Lenin that his conception of socialist construction by means of a dictatorship of the proletariat and poor peasantry was wrong. At the Second Congress of Trade Unions in early 1919 Martov spoke after Lenin. He returned to their old argument over the nature of socialist revolution. He politely referred to Lenin as the speaker from the Communist party, who had to admit now that a dictatorship of a minority had proved unworkable. The heart of the matter, Martov said, was that the dictatorship of the proletariat according to Marx could only be a dictatorship of a majority of the population under conditions of democracy for all citizens.²⁹ The speaker from the CP, continued Martov, cited Marx, who had praised the dictatorship of the proletariat as practiced by the Paris Commune, but he forgot to mention that Marx had praised the Paris Commune precisely because "it realized the dictatorship of the proletariat in the forms of democratic freedom for all citizens and not only for workers".³⁰

Martov was trying to convince Lenin not only to abandon the dictatorship of a minority, something Lenin seemed to have been willing to do, but also to recognize that there was no way to proceed to socialism other than through democracy. The government had to broaden the social base of the Soviet regime by recognizing the economic and political rights of the majority of the

²⁹ Abramovitch, ed., *Martov i ego blizkie*, pp. 71–84, here p. 79.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

population. Lenin's mistake, according to Martov, was that he saw an attack on peasants, private entrepreneurs, as desirable, although currently impossible. The true path to socialism lay in the liberation of laboring classes under the conditions of democracy.³¹ In a workers' state, Martov went on, workers' unions had to be independent from state authority, because only under such conditions could they defend their economic and political rights.³² In reality, said Martov, it was the Soviet state that was completely independent from workers. Lenin, on the other hand, insisted that workers' unions did not need to be independent from the state, because it was a workers' state.

This debate between Lenin and Martov in January 1919, at one of the crucial turning points in the development of the Soviet regime, revealed once more their fundamental disagreement on the role of workers in a proletarian revolution, a disagreement dating back to 1903. Then, in 1903, Lenin had ascribed to workers the role of followers of the vanguard, the party, because workers on their own were supposedly incapable of rising above trade union consciousness; now in 1919, he conceived of a workers' state as a state in which the party was to lead the workers, who did not need to be independent from it. Martov, in 1903, argued that workers had to build their own party instead of being tools of the vanguard. Now, in 1919, Martov demanded independence for workers from the self-appointed vanguard that controlled the state apparatus. Lenin had always favored revolutionary action from above, transforming society. Martov had consistently argued for majority action from below. The two positions were irreconcilable. Yet for the moment it appeared that Lenin favored a retreat from his offensive. The Mensheviks used this opportunity to focus on the three burning problems of the day: restoration of freely elected soviets, workers' rights, and the problem of Red militarism in the civil war.

Menshevik Policy Proposals

When on 22 January 1919, after nine months of silence, a Menshevik newspaper, *Vsegda Vpered*, came out in Moscow, its headlines read in bold print: "We would like to use our freedom of speech in order to demand, as a matter of first priority, freedom of the press for all and unconditionally!"³³ This set the tone of the Menshevik criticism of the existing order in Soviet Russia. They made it very clear that they were not going to be silent out of gratitude for the publication permit. They were going to criticize Bolshevik deeds and misdeeds even if some commissars disliked it. In the very first editorials the Mensheviks

³¹ This was formulated at the Menshevik party conference on 30 December 1918 in Moscow and published in *Gazeta pechatnikov* (2 January 1919).

³² "Rech Martova," in *Rezoliutsii nezavisimykh na Vtorom s'ezde profsoiuzov* (1919), 3–9, here 5.

³³ Editorial, *Vsegda Vpered*, no. 1 (22 January 1919), 1.

hurried to explain to their constituency the character of their opposition to the Bolsheviks, and a course of action they had just defined at the all-Russian Menshevik party conference in January 1919. They were going to play the role of a legal, loyal opposition party within the framework of the Soviet regime—legal in the sense that they pledged to observe Soviet laws and the Soviet Constitution, and loyal in the sense that they were not going to take part in any forcible attempts to overthrow the Bolshevik regime. On the other hand they made it clear that observing Soviet laws was an obligation of the Communists as well, and that they, the Social Democrats, were going to report any violations of the law both inside Russia and abroad.³⁴

The Mensheviks realized that limited freedoms, granted to them out of political expediency, could just as easily be taken away. That is why they were so eager to prod the Bolsheviks toward establishing the rule of law, whereby political rights would be guaranteed for all. They argued that the current situation in Russia was unconstitutional, since according to the Soviet Constitution, political power belonged to the soviets freely elected by workers and peasants. In reality, as everyone knew, power belonged to all kinds of committees, troikas, Chekas, and commanders who ruled however they pleased. Contested elections with free competition of political parties had not been practiced for over a year, since the spring of 1918. Restoring free elections became a task of first priority for the Mensheviks: "A new election of the soviets, accountability to the electorate, struggle against the bureaucratization of Soviet institutions, and abolition of the dictatorship of the executive committees—these are the tasks of the day!"³⁵

How little Russia changes. Then just as today, some high-ranking officials shared these same concerns. Their views put the Mensheviks in a strong position. They could hardly be accused of counterrevolutionary agitation and propaganda for demanding the same as what some critics were writing in *Pravda* and *Izvestiia*. The pages of those papers were full of horrifying stories on corruption, nepotism, competing cliques, arbitrary shootings, and misuse of authority. There was nothing the Communist hard-liners could say when the Mensheviks demanded respect for election results, a secret ballot, and accountability to the electorate. Were not the Bolsheviks themselves saying that the will of the masses was the law for the Soviet government?

Yet the Menshevik critics went further than their Bolshevik counterparts. They wrote that the ruling party had turned the Soviet system into a caricature based on bureaucratism and nepotism.³⁶ The lawlessness in the country was not an accidental byproduct of the Red Terror, as some critically minded Bolsheviks believed. It was the logical conclusion of the system of dictatorship

³⁴ "K Perevyboram v Moskovskii Sovet Rabochikh Deputatov," *Rabochii Internatsional*, no. 1 (11 March 1919), 4.

³⁵ "Ocherednaia Zadacha," *Rabochii Internatsional*, no. 1 (11 March 1919), 1.

³⁶ Mikhail Levidov, "Moskovskie pis'ma," *Mysl'*, no. 7 (February 1919), 219–23.

the Bolsheviks had instituted. The only guarantee against arbitrary rule was democracy. This was the message in one of the Mensheviks' direct criticisms of Lenin personally. The occasion was that Lenin, in one of his pronouncements, admitted that peasants were complaining of the local authorities' despicable behavior. The new policy was to seek an "agreement" with the peasantry, and Lenin called for merciless struggle against, and even executions of, such scoundrels. The front-page Menshevik editorial, most probably written by Martov, took Lenin to task for his resolve. Executions had already been tried. The result was the civil war. Not executions but profound democratization was necessary. Only then could the arbitrary rule of self-appointed cliques be overcome. Lenin himself used to write, the editorial continued, about rule by the people, control from below, and workers' participation in government. Why then did he prefer to rely on executions and control from above now?³⁷ Here again it was very difficult to accuse the Mensheviks of sedition, for they were citing Lenin himself or his ideas expressed in *The State and Revolution*.

The Mensheviks welcomed Lenin's new desire to seek an agreement with the peasantry. But they also urged the Bolsheviks to draw logical conclusions from this. An agreement could only mean that the economic interests of the peasants had to be respected. The peasants' economic interest was first and foremost to sell their product—grain. They demanded freedom of trade. To satisfy them as petty producers, said an editorial in *Vsegda Vpered*, meant to give them something more tangible than worthless paper money for their grain. It was imperative to stop the requisitions and confiscations of grain. Unfortunately, concluded Martov, "not even the first step toward this agreement was made in practice. And everything boils down to grandiose declarations of intent".³⁸

Another Menshevik columnist, N. Rozhkov, warned that unless the policy toward peasants changed, and soon, there would be widespread famine because peasants were not sowing for the market anymore, just for their personal consumption.³⁹ In actuality there were no indications that the Bolsheviks had changed their policy in the countryside, concluded *Vsegda Vpered*. They were squeezing grain from the villages just as in 1918 and provoking peasants to rebellions.⁴⁰ As is well known, famine did break out in Russia in 1920–21. The Mensheviks' dire predictions came true, and it was only then, when millions were dying, that Lenin finally legalized free trade, something the Mensheviks had advocated as early as 1919.

Since many Mensheviks worked in economic agencies, they were very well informed about conditions in industry. They believed that the situation was simply catastrophic. Most factories and plants were idle for lack of raw materials and energy. Workers were fleeing the cities en masse. Prices for basic commodi-

³⁷ "Bezplodnye deklaratsii," *Vsegda Vpered*, no. 8 (16 February 1919), 1.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ N. Rozhkov, "Perezhivaemyi moment i obshchie linii ekonomicheskoi politiki," *Rabochii International*, no. 1 (11 March 1919), 1.

⁴⁰ "Revoliutsionnyi nalog," *Vsegda Vpered*, no. 11 (20 February 1919), 1.

ties were out of control. The Mensheviks' assessment of the situation was not different from that of other observers, including Bolsheviks and foreign diplomats, but their proposed remedies were. They urged the government to denationalize at least part of industry, since it was obvious that the state was incapable of sustaining it.⁴¹ Nationalizations, especially of small enterprises, meant in reality that shops were idle, whereas in private hands they would have resumed production. What was the point, argued Fedor Dan, the coleader of the Menshevik party, in nationalizing every bakery shop? This senseless measure generated speculation, and enormous bureaucracy. The Mensheviks urged the Bolsheviks to grant concessions to foreign entrepreneurs, especially American.⁴² The biggest problem in the Bolshevik organization of industry, according to Social Democrats, was its hypercentralization. A myriad of directorates, boards (*glavki*), and centers were sitting and pushing paper in Moscow while industry was idle.⁴³ The Bolsheviks had created a bureaucratic monstrosity, and inefficient at that, and called it socialist organization of industry. What was necessary, argued Menshevik economists, was a mixed economy based on a partnership between the state and the private sector.

As in the case of agrarian policy, the Bolsheviks were forced to implement some of these Menshevik ideas when the NEP was introduced in 1921, particularly in regard to the denationalization of trade and small enterprises and granting concessions to foreigners. In 1919, however, these ideas were unpalatable to most Communists. Yet it was difficult for Bolsheviks to attack the Mensheviks for their economic proposals at a time when Lenin himself was calling for an agreement with the peasant petite bourgeoisie. The hard-liners among the Bolsheviks needed an issue that would make an attack on the Mensheviks justifiable. Menshevik criticism of Red militarism in the civil war gave them the opportunity they were seeking.

The scandal broke out over several articles in *Vsegda Vpered* devoted to the most pressing issue of the day—the military campaigns in the civil war. There were two important campaigns going on then. One—in Ukraine—developed in favor of the Bolsheviks. After the departure of the German troops, Red Army detachments poured into the political vacuum. Relying primarily on volunteer Ukrainian peasants' formations, the Bolsheviks were regaining control over Ukraine in early 1919. The second campaign—on the eastern front in the Urals, went badly for the Bolsheviks. Already at the end of December the important industrial city of Perm in the Urals was overrun by a rather small White army force under General A. N. Pepeliaev. This was the beginning of a rather successful offensive by Admiral Kolchak's White army forces—an offensive that reached its climax in March 1919 when the Whites overran all of the Urals and in some areas approached the river Volga.

⁴¹ F. Dan, "Goni prirodu v dver'," *Vsegda Vpered*, no. 7 (15 February 1919), 1.

⁴² N. Rozhkov, "Perezhiivaemyi moment i obshchie linii ekonomicheskoi politiki," *Rabochii International*, no. 1 (11 March 1919), 1.

⁴³ Mikhail Levidov, "Moskovskie pis'ma," *Mysl'*, no. 7 (February 1919), 219–23.

The Social Democrats felt obligated to explain fully their party's position on the raging Civil War. They agreed with the Communists that the Soviet Republic had to be defended and that the White army force had to be met with the Red Army's counterforce. The Mensheviks went on, however, to ask embarrassing questions as to why the Whites were able to overrun a huge area in a remarkably short time. Their answer was that workers' anti-Bolshevik insurgencies in the Izhevsk and Votkinsk area and numerous peasants' uprisings had made the Whites' advance possible. The Soviet government needed the Red Army in order to "force the obedience of striking workers and rebellious peasants in [Soviet] Russia itself."⁴⁴ Lenin and Trotsky were dreaming about creating a three-million-strong army. Yet the best way to defend the Soviet Republic from the Whites, the Mensheviks argued, was not to build up a huge Red Army but to win the support of the local population.⁴⁵ The problem with Bolshevik policy was that the Bolsheviks applied military solutions to political problems. That was a very dangerous trend, argued the Mensheviks, because any army, even if it was called Red, was based on teaching the mass of soldiers "to be a blind instrument in the hands of commanders." One could not bring about liberation by the force of bayonets, any more than one could insure the support of the people by requisitioning grain. The Bolsheviks had to change their policies and regain the support of the people, and then the Whites would not be dangerous. From this reasoning followed the Menshevik slogan: Down with the Civil War against the Workers and Peasants!

The author of this slogan was A. Pleskov, a member of the Menshevik CC. In his article "Stop the Civil War" he focused on the situation in Ukraine. The Red Army, he argued, was turning into an instrument of conquest. It was bringing not liberation but subjugation to Ukraine, for the purpose of economic exploitation: "This means that the Bolshevik authorities . . . will repeat in Ukraine the disastrous experience they practiced in central Russia, that is, they will create committees of the poor, incite one part of the population against another, incite workers against peasants, dispatch requisition detachments to Ukrainian villages, and take away bread by the force of bayonets and machine guns."⁴⁶ The Bolshevik regime, argued Pleskov, thrived on Red militarism. Even according to official sources the Red Army consumed 40 percent of all available food resources. No wonder the cities were starving. Thus the Bolsheviks had created an endless evil circle. By grain requisitions and the suppression of strikes they provoked the population to rebel; to suppress these rebellions they needed an ever larger Red Army; and to feed the army they relied on requisitions. The result was an escalation of the civil war.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ "O Krasnoi armii," *Vsegda Vpered*, no. 9 (18 February 1919), 1.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ A. Pleskov, "Prekratite grazhdanskuiu voinu," *Vsegda Vpered*, no. 11 (20 February 1919), 1.

⁴⁷ In addition to Pleskov's article, see also "Edinstvennyi put'," *Vsegda Vpered*, no. 6 (14 February 1919), 1.

This reasoning was too much for the Communists. Their patience and tolerance came to an end. The Mensheviks had dared to undermine the most sacrosanct part of the regime: the Red Army itself, which was heroically fighting against the "bandits of world imperialism" on all the fronts. Scores of articles appeared in the Communist press denouncing the Mensheviks' treason. The mildest response came from Nikolay Bukharin. He acknowledged the Mensheviks' view that Kolchak had to be fought and agreed that any army was a burden for a country as exhausted as Russia. But then he defended the Red Army's role in rendering assistance to the revolutionary cause. It would have been right to help, say, the cause of the proletarian revolution in Germany. Unfortunately Russia was too weak. The problem with the Menshevik article was that it was discrediting the Red Army in the eyes of Europe.⁴⁸ The leaders of the Moscow soviet, moderates in the Communist party, referred to Pleskov's article as "incorrect," since it was undermining the prestige of Soviet power and "inciting to rebellion against the Red Army."⁴⁹ Pleskov responded, mildly reproaching Bukharin for playing into the hands of all those thousands of parasites who could not sleep calmly since a free, independent press had reappeared in Russia.⁵⁰ But if Bukharin's and the Moscow soviet's reaction took the form of a polite disagreement, other Communist politicians were waving their fists in fury. It was high time to stop those who were slandering the glorious Red Army, those conspirators, lackeys of the bourgeoisie, traitors!⁵¹

On 25 February 1919, late at night, a Cheka detachment arrived at the editorial offices of *Vsegda Vpered*. They searched all the premises, confiscated all manuscripts, and shut down the newspaper. It was never published again. Bolshevik tolerance had lasted only one month. The Menshevik CC applied for a permit to publish another paper. For two weeks no answer came, since the Communists were debating their policy toward the Social Democrats behind closed doors. Explaining the reasons for the Communists' decision to close *Vsegda Vpered*, the Mensheviks wrote that it was due to pressure from below. They believed that "the more thoughtful and responsible among the Bolshevik leaders" had capitulated to those troikas and commanders who had gotten used to ruling uncontrollably. Those leaders feared glasnost most of all, and that is why they were screaming about Menshevik treason.⁵²

That may well have been true, but those commanders and troikas had been just as opposed to the legalization of opposition in December. Then, however, their pressure did not stop the Soviet government from changing its course. A

⁴⁸ Nikolai Bukharin, "Krasnyi militarizm i zheltyi men'shevizm," *Pravda*, no. 38 (19 February 1919), 1.

⁴⁹ "Rezoliutsiia Ispolkoma o gazete *Vsegda Vpered*," *Vsegda Vpered*, no. 14 (23 February 1919), 1.

⁵⁰ "Ideolog uchastka," *Vsegda Vpered*, no. 13 (22 February 1919), 1.

⁵¹ "Pora prekratit'," *Pravda*, no. 56 (14 March 1919), 1.

⁵² "Kapituliatsiia," *Rabochii Internatsional*, no. 1 (11 March 1919), 1.

more plausible explanation, it seems, is that from the Communists' point of view the Mensheviks were doing more harm than good. They were quite influential among European Social Democratic parties, and instead of supporting the Soviet government in its struggle against its foes, were criticizing Red militarism. From the Communists' standpoint the Mensheviks simply had not held to their part of the bargain reached in December. They had been legalized so that they could denounce foreign intervention; instead they were "undermining" the Red Army. That would not be tolerated. The closing of *Vsegda Vpered* was to teach them a lesson.

Legalization of the PSR

The short legal existence of the PSR essentially went through the same cycle as that of the Mensheviks. The key difference between the two opposition parties was that the SRs were a far more important military and political force than the Mensheviks and they were far less inclined to seek accommodation with the Bolsheviks.

During 1918 the SR-led Committee of the Constituent Assembly government (Komuch) on the Volga posed a serious military threat to Moscow. In August 1918 the SRs seem to have been very close to the realization of their goal: to overthrow the Bolshevik dictatorship and reconvene the Constituent Assembly in Moscow. Yet in September the Red Army pushed the committee's forces beyond the Volga. On 18 November Admiral Kolchak, the war minister in a national unity government, staged his coup d'état. Socialist Revolutionaries were seized, some imprisoned and some executed by unruly right-wing officers. The Directory (the government) was disbanded, and the war minister proclaimed himself the supreme ruler of Russia. Siberia and the Urals were now under military dictatorship. The SR party thus suffered a crushing defeat, squeezed by the Communists on the one side and by the military putschists on the other.

For months and years to come the SRs were going to ponder what had gone wrong in 1918 and why their attempt to provide a historical alternative to both the Communists and the generals did not succeed. Right after the coup d'état the SR party leadership made an important decision to cease temporarily their armed struggle against the Bolsheviks and direct all efforts against the military dictatorship of Kolchak. This change of SR policy was the basis for a ten-day-long legalization of the SR party on Bolshevik-held territory in March 1919. It is important to determine whether this legalization represented a genuine attempt by the two sides to find a basis of understanding or whether from the very beginning it was only a political maneuver dictated by military and political circumstances.

In the chaotic days after Kolchak's coup d'état, prominent SR politicians and

party leaders went underground. There remained two political bodies that had authority to make decisions and shape party policy: the Central Committee and the Congress of Members of the Constituent Assembly. It is from the latter that a group of politicians emerged, headed by the CC member V. K. Volsky—a group that later came to be known as the Ufa delegation. In fact it was not a delegation at all but an ad hoc committee of members of the Constituent Assembly who happened to be in Ufa and who shared the opinion that in view of the Whites' atrocities the PSR and all democrats had to defend the Constituent Assembly and fight the Whites. The question was whether to continue armed struggle against the Communists as well. The position taken by the SR party as a whole or by the Committee of the Constituent Assembly as a whole was still of great political and military significance because the committee represented the only legitimately elected political body in Russia and because, most importantly, there were still significant military forces that had fought under the banners of the Constituent Assembly. Were these units to resist the putsch and cease armed struggle against the Reds, they would greatly enhance the strength of the Reds. Were they to recognize Kolchak as their new leader and continue to fight the Reds, they would add to Kolchak's strength and legitimacy.

The main reason that the Bolsheviks entered into negotiations with the members of the Constituent Assembly was that they were interested in the future of these units. Unofficial preliminary talks started in Ufa before the arrival of the Red Army when both the SRs and the local Communists were still underground. This equality in status generated a sincere desire to join forces in a common struggle against the Whites. Victor Chernov, the chairman of the Constituent Assembly and a key leader of the PSR, later wrote that he had great reservations from the very beginning about the initiative of Volsky and Company. He felt that even if the Committee of the Constituent Assembly decided to cease armed struggle against the Bolsheviks, it should do so only as a result of negotiations and not before any agreement on anything was made. The Komuch's bargaining position would have been much stronger if it had held on to the option of continued simultaneous armed struggle against both the Communists and the putschists. Many believed this was no longer possible, since the Komuch government was no longer a government and did not control any territory. Chernov on the other hand believed that it was possible to continue partisan warfare against both the Reds and the Whites if an agreement with the Bolsheviks could not be reached.⁵³ A few months later Chernov and the SR CC disassociated themselves completely from the Ufa negotiations, but in December 1918 it seems Chernov did not oppose the negotiations as such. He had

⁵³ This was the main point in Chernov's speech at the last session of the Congress of Members of the Constituent Assembly on 28 November. See Burevoi, *Raspad*, p. 58. See also Tschernow (Chernov), *Meine Schicksale in Sowjet Russland*, p. 15. For later disassociating himself from the Ufa delegation, see Viktor Chernov, "Moi Otvet," *Delo naroda*, no. 4 (23 January 1919), 2.

great reservations about the Bolsheviks' willingness to grant concessions, but he was willing to let Volsky try. He correctly believed that the chances for getting tangible concessions would be higher if the party negotiated from a position of strength.

Clearly the mainstream political opinion in the SR party was swinging to the left. According to Chernov many favored finding a *modus vivendi* with the Bolsheviks against the Whites. Chernov was opposed to holding talks in Ufa after its liberation by the Reds, because in such an environment the negotiating parties would not be equal. He proposed an alternative plan: let someone go to Moscow, contact Maxim Gorky, and ask him to contact the Bolsheviks and act as an intermediary.⁵⁴ The main item on the PSR's agenda was that all the civil liberties proclaimed by the Bolsheviks themselves in October 1917, including the convocation of the Constituent Assembly be respected.

On 31 December 1918 V. K. Volsky, N. V. Sviatitsky, K. S. Burevoi, and others, however, decided to negotiate with the Bolsheviks in Ufa on their own.⁵⁵ The negotiations were not between the Bolshevik party and the SR party but between representatives of Soviet government and members of the overthrown Constituent Assembly government. In the name of the Committee of the Constituent Assembly, the Ufa delegation called on the units loyal to the overthrown government to cease armed struggle against Soviet troops.⁵⁶ The Ufa delegation protested against the Allied intervention in Russian affairs on the side of the Whites and declared it desirable to coordinate efforts in a joint struggle against the Whites.⁵⁷

The negotiations progressed very slowly, however, because the Bolsheviks wanted to gain time, which they believed was working in their favor. The Ufa delegation had already called on the Komuch-led troops not to fight the Reds. This was an important gesture of goodwill, but the delegation had no other bargaining power. Nevertheless, the Ufa delegation proposed that guarantees of personal security be given to every soldier who crossed the front line to the Reds; that political amnesty be granted to all those who had defended the territory of the Constituent Assembly against the Bolsheviks; that the PSR be fully legalized as a political party on Bolshevik-held territory; that all civil liberties be restored; that a new government of all socialist parties be formed, a government accountable to the Constituent Assembly; and that a new Constituent Assembly be elected.⁵⁸ The Communists rejected outright the idea of a coalition government or of elections to a new Constituent Assembly. For the SRs as a whole, however, convocation of the Constituent Assembly was not a matter for nego-

⁵⁴ Tschernow (Chernov), *Meine Schicksalle in Sowjet Russland*, p. 16.

⁵⁵ Burevoi, *Raspad*, p. 60.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

⁵⁷ V. Vol'sky, "Ufimskie peregovory," in Burevoi et al, eds., *K prekrashcheniiu voiny vnutri demokratii*, pp. 39–51, here p. 49.

⁵⁸ "Peregovory s Uchredilovtsami," *Petrogradskaia Pravda*, no. 13 (18 January 1919), 2.

tiation. If that could not be achieved, there was no point in any negotiations. More and more party leaders and local organizations therefore began to question the authority of "the so-called Ufa delegation" to conduct negotiations. A January resolution of the SR organization of Moscow "sharply censured the negotiations conducted by the Ufa delegation of the Constituent Assembly . . . as an act of total political capitulation to the despotic power of the Bolsheviks."⁵⁹ The extent of the Ufa delegation's authority had to be clarified, and the party's political platform had to be defined more clearly. For this purpose a party conference assembled in Moscow in early February 1919.

To a certain extent the conference resolution reiterated what the Ufa delegation had been saying concerning the change in SR policy. The PSR resolutely rejected the intervention of foreign powers in Russian internal affairs and protested against the direct aid these powers were providing to the Whites.⁶⁰ The conference reiterated that the PSR saw its task as a resolute struggle against tsarist restoration with all means available. The party pledged to "direct all its forces toward the goal of overthrowing those reactionary governments and reuniting these parts of the country with Russia."⁶¹ Furthermore the conference confirmed the decision that the party should cease armed struggle against the Bolsheviks for the time being, motivating this decision by reference to the fact that the forces of democracy were weak in the country. The conference did not rule out the possibility of resuming armed struggle at some point in the future: "All calls to start insurrection immediately, all calls for armed struggle, at a time when organized democracy is not a true independent force, must be removed from the agenda."⁶²

These decisions strengthened the position of the Ufa delegation, since they could have formed a basis for an agreement with the Bolsheviks. However, the conference resolution stated that the party "sharply censures [*osuzhdaet*] the steps undertaken by the Ufa delegation. The conference considers that the [Ufa] delegation must abstain from any negotiations with Soviet authorities concerning political agreement involving the PSR."⁶³ The main reason for this decision clearly was the Communists' refusal to agree on new elections to the Constituent Assembly. The Communist party, argued many of the SR speakers, remained opposed to democracy. It continued to violate its own promises given in October 1917. The Communists remained an antipeasant force whose policies were designed to exploit the Russian peasantry: "by system-

⁵⁹ "Rezoliutsiia konferentsii Moskovskoi organizatsii PSR o tekushchem momente," (26 January 1919), Ts.P.A., TsKa RKP(b), Fond 274, TsKa PSR, Opis' 1, document 11, p. 12.

⁶⁰ *Sovremennyi moment v otsenke Partii sotsialistov-revoliutsionerov (Fevral'—Mart 1919)*, published in Paris by I. A. Rubanovich, a representative of the PSR in the International Labor Office, cited here from the New York edition (1919), p. 14.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

atic armed struggle against the peasantry, by barbaric suppression of the peasantry, by economic plunder of the countryside . . . Soviet power creates an artificial disunity between workers and peasants and objectively aids the cause of counterrevolution."⁶⁴ In other words as long as peasants remained unequal in their voting rights and economic status, there could not be any agreement. E. Timofeev, a CC member put it in this way:

What values can the democratic forces defend together with the Soviet power and under its leadership? Is it electoral law only for those whom the soviets consider useful? Is it "civil liberties" for the socialists to be taken to the Cheka? Is it great social changes as a result of which the cities have no meat other than dog meat now and the countryside is suffering from violence and robbery? After a year-and-a-half rule by this so-called worker and peasant government the proletariat has ceased to exist and the peasantry has begun to remember the times under the old regime with nostalgia.⁶⁵

The Bolsheviks most probably did not count on such a strong rebuff from the SR party conference. After all the Communists had the Red Army, and the Constituent Assembly's army was defeated. The decisions of this party conference were much more authoritative than the decisions of a group of overthrown politicians; Volsky and his team found themselves in a political vacuum. Their own party had refused to back them. And yet they continued to negotiate. Three crucial sessions took place in Moscow from the ninth to the nineteenth of February 1919. The Ufa delegation consisted of N. A. Shmelev, V. K. Volsky, N. V. Sviatitsky, N. I. Rakitnikov, K. S. Burevoi, and B. N. Chernenikov. On the Soviet government side were Foreign Minister G. V. Chicherin, his deputy Lev Karakhan, Minister of Finance Nikolai Krestinsky, and the Moscow soviet chairman, Lev Kamenev.⁶⁶

The Soviet side was favorably disposed to the legalization of the SRs, but it phrased this willingness in a way insulting to the SRs. Legalization would be possible if the SRs were to prove that they were going to struggle not only against the Whites and foreign intervention but also against those SRs who "agitated against Soviet power."⁶⁷ In other words: "We will let you defend us but not criticize us." The negotiations were at a dead end, but on 20 February it was suddenly announced that the SR party was going to be legalized, that its members would be granted amnesty, and that personal security would be guaranteed to those who had fought the Communists.⁶⁸ The Bolsheviks used the announcement of this "accord" in their foreign propaganda to the fullest advan-

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 17.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 45.

⁶⁶ "Ufimskaia Delegatsiia," *Vsegda Vpered*, no. 4 (11 February 1919).

⁶⁷ "Soveshchanie s Pravymi Eserami," *Pravda*, no. 31 (11 February 1919), 3.

⁶⁸ "Delegatsiia Uchreditel'nogo Sobraniia i Sovetskaia Vlast," *Vsegda Vpered*, no. 12 (21 February 1919), 2.

tage. Now all Russian socialist parties were portrayed as having rallied behind the Soviet government against the dictatorship of the Whites and foreign intervention. No doubt this dramatic announcement was made to enhance the status of the fledgling Ufa delegation in the SR party. The delegation could claim that although it had not achieved a reconconvocation of the Constituent Assembly, it had obtained legalization of the PSR. Indeed, the PSR Central Committee interpreted the Bolsheviks' move as an attempt to undermine its authority in the SR party. The Bolsheviks were signaling to the SR organizations that their legal existence was possible only if they supported the Ufa delegation rather than the recalcitrant Central Committee. This is why, on 26 February, the PSR CC issued a strongly worded rebuff to the Ufa delegation: "No PSR organizations have undertaken any negotiations on legalization or any other steps in this direction. Any kind of statements by the members of the Ufa delegation in their talks with the Bolsheviks or in the press have taken place on their own initiative, and the PSR is not responsible for them in any way."⁶⁹ For the first time a note of hostility toward the Ufa delegation could be detected in a statement of the PSR CC. Before too long the Ufa delegation would lead its followers to an open split from the rest of the party.

Victor Chernov arrived in Moscow in early March and read the protocols of the negotiations with the Bolsheviks. This convinced him that the "legalization" was a temporary ploy designed to split the SR party. The Bolsheviks were not interested in reaching an agreement but in learning all they could about the military potential of the eastern front. The negotiations were always diverted to SRs' answering questions on the strength of troops, positions, movements, numbers, armaments, morale, and so on before any political problems were even discussed.⁷⁰ If splitting the SRs was the Bolshevik goal, they were partly successful. Victor Chernov and many others developed a strong antipathy to the members of the Ufa delegation. In their opinion these "delegates" had given away the party's trump cards without obtaining anything in return.

Debate on the Cheka

The legalization of the opposition parties was halfhearted and incomplete; yet it was a serious attempt by the moderate Bolsheviks to return to the constitutional order that had existed before the lawlessness of the Red Terror. In that overall objective the opposition parties and the moderate Bolsheviks shared identical goals. They were political allies. They both believed that a return to the constitutional order would be impossible without establishing the rule of law. Hard-liners in the Communist party clearly wanted to roll back the legalization of the

⁶⁹ "Protokoly zasedanii TsKa PSR," (26 February 1919 session), Ts.P.A., Fond 274, TsKa PSR, Opis' 1, document 7.

⁷⁰ Tschernow (Chernov), *Meine Schicksalle in Sowjet Russland*, p. 19.

opposition. Yet Moscow party leaders such as Kamenev, Osinsky, and some others resisted going that far. The debate on policy toward the opposition parties unfolded exactly at the time when the debate on the future of the Cheka reached its climax in February 1919. The two issues were very much interconnected. They revolved around the questions, What kind of political activity was permissible in Soviet Russia? And what was the role of the Cheka, the extraordinary political police, going to be?

The Cheka was the main perpetrator of lawlessness and terror. Dozens of examples were published in the Menshevik and SR press as well as in *Pravda*. Statements of the leading Cheka bosses were explicit enough. In a letter to the local Chekas, the All-Russian Cheka wrote: "In its activity, the All-Russian Cheka is absolutely independent, and it conducts searches, arrests and executions and reports to the Council of People's Commissars and to the CEC afterward."⁷¹ The key word here is "afterward." The Cheka defined its prerogatives as not requiring permission from any authority prior to conducting searches and executions. In another internal communication with the local Chekas the situation was depicted even less ambiguously. The All-Russian Cheka ordered the local Chekas "to stop terrorizing workers and peasants," thus acknowledging that such terrorizing took place. And in another instruction the All-Russian Cheka ordered local Chekas (presumably in Ukraine) "to stop terror against the peaceful population" in newly conquered territories.⁷²

From the point of view of the Mensheviks and SRs and some Bolshevik critics, these actions of the Cheka were illegal and unconstitutional. The Menshevik leader Martov wrote that political authority kept changing hands, "from the Central [Executive] Committee to the soviets, from the soviets to the commissars, and from the commissars to the Chekas."⁷³ The opposition demanded an abolition of terror, of the death penalty, and of the Cheka.⁷⁴ On these interrelated issues many high-ranking Bolsheviks held identical views. The paper of the CEC, *Izvestiia*, published an article demanding that the legal rights of Soviet citizens be respected. Currently those arrested by the Cheka could be shot arbitrarily without any trial or defense or accountability. The author, A. Diakonov, wrote: "I have asked myself a question several times, and I

⁷¹ "Raz'iasnenie Vecheka o poriadke podchineniia Cheka na mestakh," document 167, in Belov, ed., *Iz istorii Vecheka*, p. 200.

⁷² "Prikaz no. 113 Vecheka mestnym Cheka ob izmenenii i uluchshenii ikh raboty" (14 December 1918), in Belov, ed., *Iz istorii Vecheka*, p. 236–37.

⁷³ Martov, "Novyi Kurs v Sovetskoi Rossii," *Mysl'*, no. 1–2 (February 1919), 10.

⁷⁴ G. Leggett, "The Cheka and a Crisis of Communist Conscience," *Survey*, vol. 25, no. 3 (Summer 1980), 122–37, here p. 131. It is important that Soviet editors of the official Soviet collection of documents on the Cheka acknowledged the fact that the Mensheviks and other "enemies" within the CP, as they were called, demanded abolition of the Cheka: see Belov, ed., *Iz istorii Vecheka*, p. 232. This demand was formulated in "K perevyboram v Moskovskii Sovet," *Rabochii Internatsional*, no. 1 (March 1919), 4.

have read and reread [government] decrees trying to find whether the All-Russian Cheka had a right to execute without a trial or to impose any kind of penalties, and I have not found that right [in law]. It is not there, and it cannot be there."⁷⁵

Criticisms of the Cheka were also pouring in to the Bolshevik CC. Most complaints came from the provincial executive committees of Soviets (ECs). The journal of the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs pointedly changed its name from *Courier* to *Power to the Soviets* (*Vlast' Sovetov*). It became a political slogan. After all the October revolution had proclaimed power to the soviets and not to the political police. The ECs of soviets naturally insisted that the local Chekas be subordinate to the local soviets.⁷⁶ Clearly the EC functionaries were not defending democracy but their own prerogatives. They felt threatened by the power of the Cheka to arrest and execute anyone.

A special commission under the auspices of the CEC investigated the activities of the Cheka and presented a report to Lenin. On 9 January 1919 Kamenev, one of the key Bolshevik leaders supporting reform of the Cheka, proposed a draft resolution to Lenin to abolish the Cheka altogether.⁷⁷ The Moscow CP committee debated the status of the Cheka on 27 January. *Izvestiia* published only a short note to that effect, without rendering what exactly was said at the meeting. The Menshevik paper reported that a heated exchange took place between Nikolai Krylenko of the People's Commissariat of Justice and Iakov Peters, deputy chairman of the Cheka. Krylenko was reported as saying that no one had given the Cheka the right to execute people. Peters defended the Cheka role in "combating banditry." In the end the Moscow CP committee resolved that the authority to try and convict people had to be withdrawn from the Cheka, whose role was to be limited henceforth to that of an investigative institution.⁷⁸ Thus a powerful ad hoc coalition of political forces was lobbying for drastically curbing or abolishing the prerogatives of the Cheka: the opposition parties, the CEC (nominally the supreme legislative institution) led by Kamenev, the Moscow CP organization, numerous local ECs of soviets, the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs, and the People's Commissariat of Justice.

⁷⁵ A. Diakonov, "Sud ili rasprava," *Izvestiia TsIK* (1 February 1919), 1.

⁷⁶ Peters, deputy chairman of the All-Russian Cheka, acknowledged this in his interview to *Izvestiia*, but he objected to this demand: see "Zaiavlenie Zamestitelia Predsedatelia Vecheka Ia. Kh. Petersa," *Izvestiia TsIK* (17 October 1918), in Belov, ed., *Iz istorii Vecheka*, pp. 200–203, here p. 201.

⁷⁷ According to Boris Nicolaevsky, an émigré Menshevik historian and an archivist, an influential group within Lenin's government itself—the CPC—favored the liquidation of the Cheka. See Boris Nicolaevsky, "Pervaia popytka istorii mashiny Sovetskogo terrora," *Sotsialisticheskii Vestnik*, no. 1 (January 1958), 54–56, here p. 55. The SR sources also report that rumors were circulating in Moscow at the time about liquidation of the Cheka: see *Cheka*, p. 134.

⁷⁸ "Rezoliutsiia Moskovskogo Komiteta RKP(b)," *Izvestiia TsIK* (30 January 1919).

On 3 February 1919 the Communist CC stated in a letter to the local Chekas that it was drafting new rules of operation for the Cheka.⁷⁹ The new rules became law after they were adopted at the CEC session of 17 February. At first glance, major structural changes in the status of the Cheka were introduced. The Cheka was deprived of the authority to render verdicts. That authority was henceforth to be in the hands of the revolutionary tribunals. The role of the Cheka was to investigate crimes but not to render verdicts or pass sentences. The notorious district-level (*uezd*) Chekas were abolished altogether.⁸⁰ Nevertheless Feliks Dzerzhinsky, the chairman of the Cheka, proposed a number of amendments to enhance the role of the Cheka in exceptional circumstances. In case of armed rebellions he proposed that the Cheka retain the authority to make extralegal reprisals (*rasprava*). The same would apply to areas declared to be in the state of emergency. Dzerzhinsky also wanted to continue running the concentration camps: "Complimentary to the verdicts passed by the courts, it is necessary to retain the authority to pass sentences in administrative fashion, specifically incarceration into concentration camps. Even now we are not utilizing convict labor to the full extent for socially useful work. And therefore I suggest that we retain these concentration camps for the use of the labor of those arrested."⁸¹

These recommendations were adopted by the CEC. Furthermore, in order to eliminate friction between the ECs of soviets and the Chekas in the provinces, Dzerzhinsky was appointed people's commissar of internal affairs, and in order to eliminate friction between revolutionary tribunals and the Cheka, Dzerzhinsky's deputy, Peters, was appointed chairman of the Revolutionary Tribunal. Few realized the long-term implications of these appointments. In real terms they enhanced rather than limited the authority of the extraordinary political police. From then on the Cheka was to control not only its own extralegal apparatus but also the apparatus of the tribunals and of the local soviets. The Chekas were not going to be subordinate to the soviets, but the soviets were going to be subordinate to the head of the Cheka. Indeed, the extraordinary political police were going to remain outside the control of any elected institutions as long as they retained the prerogative of administrative reprisals outside the courts.⁸² The "reform" of the Cheka was thus actually a defeat for those who were striving to establish a legal order in Soviet Russia.

⁷⁹ TsKa RKP(b), in Belov, ed., *Iz istorii Vecheka*, p. 250.

⁸⁰ "Décret du Comité Exécutif Central des Soviets sur la Suppression des Tchekas de district," in Jacques Baynac, ed., *La Terreur sous Lénine*, p. 60.

⁸¹ F. Dzerzhinskii, "O deiatel'nosti Vecheka. Doklad na zasedanii VTsIK," in Dzerzhinskii, *Izbrannnye proizvedeniia v dvukh tomakh*, p. 188.

⁸² See instructions of the CP CC to the local Chekas on how to deal with uprisings: "Tsirkuliarnoe pis'mo TsKa RKP(b) gubernskim komitetam partii, 15 marta 1919 goda," *Perepiska Sekretariata*, vol. 6, pp. 137–38.

Lenin's role in preserving the Cheka was crucial.⁸³ There was nothing wrong with terror against class enemies, in Lenin's view. He was not concerned with creating a system of checks and balances in his government. The only problem was that there were mistakes and excesses. These were to be corrected by the capable leadership of comrade Dzerzhinsky. The Cheka was to remain the instrument of the party, accountable to Lenin. There was no problem, because Lenin trusted Dzerzhinsky. He had a reliable comrade in a key position. But this rather personal approach to matters of state showed a lack of foresight on Lenin's part. Did he ever worry what would happen when he was no longer in control? Was he not concerned that the institutional structures he created would perpetuate arbitrary rule outside the law or public control? There are no indications in Lenin's writings that he was concerned at that time. But when he turned to some of these issues at the end of his career in 1922, it was too late. By then Stalin had manipulated the Communist state to reflect his own personal style of government, the way Lenin had done earlier.

The Mensheviks reacted angrily to the adopted changes in the status of the Cheka. They felt that the "reform" dealt a heavy blow to their hopes for restoration of the rule of law. The inalienable human right to be tried in a court of law was still being violated. Even worse, administrative convictions without trial and incarceration in concentration camps—measures thought to be temporary and extraordinary even by the Communists themselves, were now a part of the permanent system. The Mensheviks had the courage to write about these changes in *Vsegda Vpered*, knowing full well what reaction this would produce in the Cheka. They denounced the new status of the Cheka as a reincarnation of the prerogatives of the tsarist secret police.⁸⁴ They objected even to the new rules that limited Cheka authority to investigation. Why should extraordinary police, they asked, be entrusted with investigation? Why could that not be done by investigative judges, elected by the people? What had begun as a promising attempt to restore a normal system of justice ended as a miserable fiasco.

The End of the "New Course"

Simultaneously with the debate on the Cheka within the Communist party, a new debate on the status of opposition parties unfolded in March 1919 at the Eighth CP Congress.⁸⁵ As in the past, two policies were recommended each by

⁸³ Michael Heller, "Lenin and the Cheka: The Real Lenin," *Survey*, vol. 24, no. 2 (Spring 1979), 175–92.

⁸⁴ "Chrezvychainaia vesna," *Vsegda Vpered*, no. 10 (19 February 1919).

⁸⁵ Unfortunately, Soviet editors of the "minutes" have cut out almost the entire discussion. It is clear from the "minutes" that the debate opened at 6:55 P.M. and ended at 10:15 P.M. on 20 March 1919. Yet the published proceedings are only 26 pages long. The lion's share is missing.

a different Bolshevik faction. One of the hard-liners, I. V. Mgeladze, published a critique of the Menshevik proposals. Granting freedom of political campaigning to opposition parties would disrupt the work of the soviets. Abolishing the death penalty would be inadmissible because it was necessary to destroy class enemies. Restoring freedom of speech would amount to allowing "enemies of the people" and "lackeys of the bourgeoisie" speak. Mgeladze was most upset by the Menshevik demand to cease terror and abolish the Cheka. Such a demand, he insisted, could originate only from the enemies of the revolution.⁸⁶ One of the delegates, R. I. Levin, proposed to annul the CEC law on the legalization of opposition parties. The fact that it was not done suggests that the moderates won on that score, but their speeches sounded clearly on the defensive. N. Osinsky said: "The Question is: Can we, as we are making steps toward a form of proletarian democracy from a form of military state organization, can we broaden the franchise, can we begin holding new elections to the soviets regularly, can we grant complete freedom of campaigning and of the press to the petit bourgeois parties? No, so far we cannot do it."⁸⁷ This speech was a big step backward in comparison with Osinsky's articles in January. Then he asserted exactly the opposite. Nevertheless he described the current regime as a military state and implied that proletarian democracy was something desirable although presently impossible to achieve.

The hard-liners, of course, did not want to hear anything about democracy of any kind. For them, there were only two systems possible: either the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie or the dictatorship of the proletariat (meaning their own dictatorship). As in the debate on the Cheka, among the moderates in the Bolshevik party were the Moscow party organization and leaders of the Moscow soviet—people like Osinsky, Kamenev, Aleksei Rykov, and Anatoliy Lunarcharsky. The hard-liners included Dzerzhinsky and the Cheka, executive committees, local functionaries, and commanders from the provinces. In February and March 1919 Dzerzhinsky collected all kinds of statements made at regional and national conferences by SRs. Relying on this information, he drafted a memorandum, "Position of the SRs," which tried to prove that "no changes in the ideological position of the SRs have taken place."⁸⁸ By implication the memo suggested that no changes should take place in Bolshevik policy either; the SRs should not be legalized. Lenin, as usual, maneuvered between the factions. As he would do in the trade unions debate a year later, he tried to find a middle ground. On the one hand he continued to talk about broadening the social base of Soviet power and reaching an agreement with the peasants; on the other he went along with the Cheka operation against the opposition parties, which was just about to begin while the CP congress was still in session. In

⁸⁶ I. V. Mgeladze, "Izbiratel'naia platforma Men'shevikov," *Pravda*, no. 53 (16 March 1919), 1.

⁸⁷ *Vos'moi S'ezd RKP(b)*, p. 306.

⁸⁸ "Pozitsiia Eserov. Mart 1919," in Ts.P.A., Dzerzhinsky Archive, Fond 76, Opis' 3, file "O deiatel'nosti pravyykh i levyykh Eserov," document 49.

Lenin's published pronouncements there is no advocacy for banning opposition parties again, neither is there a defense of continued toleration. In his speeches Lenin simply admitted that the policy toward opposition parties was contradictory and inconsistent.

It is quite possible that Lenin was not certain himself how to deal with the opposition parties at this point. On the one hand it was necessary to maintain the impression abroad that the Social Democrats and Socialist Revolutionaries were legal parties in Russia because the Congress of the Second International was in session in Bern. It was important to encourage European socialist parties to oppose Allied intervention in Russia, and therefore it was important that they perceive Bolshevik Russia as a proletarian multiparty democracy. Furthermore, Lenin was preoccupied with the founding of the Third International, and he was negotiating with the German left-wing Social Democrats—the Independents, many of whom were Martov's old-time colleagues. On the other hand the Mensheviks' attempts to make public some of the negative features of the "proletarian" dictatorship were clearly irritating and had to be stopped, and the SRs' subversive potential in the countryside could not be ignored.

After the closing of *Vsegda Vpered* at the end of February, and throughout March, there was no consistent Bolshevik policy toward the opposition parties. Each Bolshevik faction followed its own policy. The moderates continued to support freedom of the press, and the Social Democrats received a permit to publish a new journal. They were given assurances that the permit for a daily paper would be settled within a few days. When the new SD weekly came out on 11 March, it showed no signs that the Mensheviks were ready to abstain from criticism. What the Communists found particularly offensive was that the weekly appealed to the local Menshevik organizations to collect information on social and political conditions in their provinces.⁸⁹ This information the Mensheviks promised to send to the European Socialist and Social Democratic parties. Defiantly the weekly wrote: "We have appealed and we will appeal to the world proletariat!"⁹⁰ Moreover the Social Democrats announced that they had already sent to European socialists a list of socialists executed by the Bolsheviks during the Red Terror. This was most embarrassing. The Bolshevik propaganda machine was depicting Soviet Russia as the country of a victorious proletariat. They wanted to persuade reluctant European socialists to join the new International just proclaimed to have been born in Moscow. In what turned out to be the last issue of the Menshevik journal, the SDs wrote that the Third International was no more than a gathering of a group of émigré politicians who had no right to speak on behalf of the European workers. They accused the Bolsheviks of trying to create an organization that would control the international workers' movement from above.⁹¹

⁸⁹ "K priedzu Bernskoi delegatsii," *Rabochii Internatsional*, no. 1 (11 March 1919).

⁹⁰ "Ostan'te," *Vsegda Vpered*, no. 7 (15 February 1919).

⁹¹ A. Ermanskii, "Kremlevskii Parad," *Rabochii Internatsional*, no. 1 (11 March 1919).

This critique must have overfilled the cup of Bolshevik patience. *Pravda* exploded with a rash of articles condemning Menshevik treason.⁹² Some demanded the arrest of all Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries immediately. On 17 March, the day when the second issue of the Menshevik weekly was supposed to come out, a Cheka detachment arrived in the editorial office and shut it down.⁹³ No Menshevik periodical, as it turned out, was ever to come out legally in Moscow again. The crackdown on opposition continued. On 20 March a Cheka detachment arrived at the office of the Menshevik Central Committee.⁹⁴ They politely asked all those present to show their identification. The Cheka wanted to make sure that there were no deserters from the Red Army in the Menshevik CC. The entire Central Committee was detained and taken to Lubianka (the Cheka headquarters and prison). Until early dawn they were interrogated. Martov was the first to be released. The Cheka agents were so polite (as was rumored on Lenin's insistence) that he was driven home in a car.⁹⁵

During the next several days an intense struggle must have been going on at the very top of the Bolshevik leadership, since contradictory statements were made by the Moscow soviet and the Cheka. On 20 March Dzerzhinsky published an undisguised threat to the opposition parties: "Hereby the Cheka declares that it will not distinguish between White Guardists like Krasnov [a general] and White Guardists from the parties of the Mensheviks and Left SRs. The punitive hand of the Cheka will fall with equal force upon the heads of both. The Mensheviks and the SRs we have arrested will be held as hostages, and their fate will depend on the behavior of these parties."⁹⁶ It was a return to the practices of the Red Terror, and a clear violation of the Cheka prerogatives as defined by the CEC. The Cheka had no authority to seize hostages or to carry out arrests. On 23 March Latsis announced that the Cheka had arrested five leading Mensheviks as deserters.⁹⁷

The Moscow EC, however, published an explanation in *Izvestiia* that the Mensheviks were merely detained, not taken as hostages, and only because the Cheka was looking for deserters. According to law, the Cheka was supposed to be responsible to the Moscow soviet. On behalf of the Menshevik CC Martov sent an official inquiry to the Moscow soviet. He asked the leaders of the soviet

⁹² "Golosa rabochikh," *Pravda*, no. 63 (23 March 1919), 4. See also, for example, Bukharin's angry article condemning the Mensheviks' sending information abroad. "Bor'ba mezhdunarodnogo proletariata i gospoda menshevikov," *Pravda* no. 54 (11 March 1919), 1.

⁹³ "Zakrytie gazet," *Rabochii Internatsional*, no. 2 (17 March 1919), and "Ot TsKa RSDRP," *Delo naroda*, no. 1 (20 March 1919), 3.

⁹⁴ Sokolov, *Bol'sheviki o bol'shevikakh*, p. 20.

⁹⁵ D. Iu. Dalin, "Otryvki Vospominanii," in Abramovitsch, ed., *Martov i ego blizkie*, pp. 111–12; "Zalozhniki," *Delo naroda*, no. 2 (21 March 1919), 2; and "Aresty Sotsial Demokratov," *Delo naroda*, no. 3 (22 March 1919), 2.

⁹⁶ Dzerzhinsky's statement was published in the SR paper. See "Snova," *Delo naroda*, no. 1 (20 March 1919).

⁹⁷ "Komu oni sluzhat," *Izvestiia TsIK*, no. 63 (23 March 1919).

on what grounds the Cheka had arrested leaders of a legal political party. The explanation that the Cheka was looking for deserters was not satisfactory, because none of the CC members was of draft age, and two women ineligible for the draft were arrested as well. Martov demanded an answer to two questions: whether the Cheka had acted on its own and thus in violation of the law, and whether the Social Democratic party was still legal.⁹⁸ The Moscow soviet EC, led by Kamenev, sent a conciliatory reply. It stated that the SD party was legal, since there was no CEC decree annulling legalization. The Cheka was asked to furnish an explanation for its actions. The seals were removed from the Menshevik CC offices, and all those arrested were released.

The first round between Dzerzhinsky's Cheka and Kamenev's Moscow soviet thus seems to have ended with Kamenev's victory. On 25 March the Moscow soviet debated the policy toward the opposition parties. The closed session of the Bolshevik faction lasted over three hours, and not a word on the proceedings was published. This was usually a sign of serious disagreement within the Bolshevik leadership.⁹⁹

A few days earlier, on 20 March, the SR party had been legalized and resumed publication of its paper, *Delo naroda*, for the first time since June 1918. It appeared, at least for the moment, that the legal existence of the opposition parties would be tolerated. When the first issue of *Delo naroda* came out, Chernov and other SR party leaders believed that their "legalization" was a temporary maneuver: "The Left SRs are outlawed. The Social Democrats have been deprived of the possibility to speak openly and have in fact been driven underground. But we are legalized. What does that mean?"¹⁰⁰ Mass arrests of the Left SRs in mid-March were followed by the unexpected legalization of the SRs. Was there any logic in this? asked Chernov.

However short the period of their "legalization" was going to be, Chernov pledged that the SRs were going to write openly about the social and political problems of the country. Articles in *Delo naroda* were much more outspoken and sharp than in *Vsegda Vpered*. The paper published material on the Red Terror and the atrocities of the Cheka.¹⁰¹ Chernov published a devastating critique of Lenin's polemic with the German socialist Karl Kautsky on the nature of the dictatorship of the proletariat and the problem of who was a renegade of socialism. It is astonishing that the paper was not closed the same day after such a humiliation of the "leader of the world revolution."¹⁰² SR editorials argued that Bolshevik Communism was bankrupt, that industry had

⁹⁸ L. [Lu.] Martov, "Iz istorii odnoi legalizatsii," *Delo naroda*, no. 3 (22 March 1919), 3. The SRs displayed political courage by agreeing to publish Martov's letter. It was only the third day that their own paper was allowed to come out, and they risked a great deal by showing their solidarity with the Social Democrats.

⁹⁹ "Moskva. Zasedanie Mossoвета," *Delo naroda*, no. 6 (26 March 1919), 2.

¹⁰⁰ Viktor Chernov, "Nas Legalizavali," *Delo naroda*, no. 1 (20 March 1919), 1.

¹⁰¹ "Pamiati Aleksandra Vasil'evicha Turby," *Delo naroda*, no. 1 (20 March 1919), 1.

¹⁰² Viktor Chernov, "Lenin protiv Kautskogo," *Delo naroda*, no. 1 (20 March 1919).

ceased to exist, and that an attack on the peasantry would turn its sympathy toward the Whites. The Bolsheviks' course was suicidal for them and for the revolution: "We demand from the ruling party: abolish the dictatorship of the party, abandon the policy of violence in the countryside, and reestablish all civil liberties generally and during elections to the soviets in particular."¹⁰³

Armed with this "counterrevolutionary propaganda," Dzerzhinsky managed to reverse the decision of the Moscow soviet to legalize opposition, and on 31 March a much larger operation against the opposition parties was launched all over Russia. Either the Cheka had decided to present the Moscow soviet with a fait accompli, or, what is more likely, Lenin had been informed and had sanctioned the Cheka's actions. The number of arrests was greater than anything since the days of Red Terror. In Moscow alone at least two hundred people were seized. The SRs' *Delo naroda* was shut down after ten issues.¹⁰⁴ The editorial office was demolished by the Cheka detachment. Machines were smashed; all files, correspondence, subscription lists, and addresses were seized by the Cheka. Agents waiting in ambush on the premises immediately arrested and jailed everyone who entered. More than one hundred people were seized in this fashion.¹⁰⁵ Arrests were going on in the major provincial cities as well: in Tula, Smolensk, Voronezh, Penza, Samara, Saratov, Sormovo, and Kostroma. Several hundred Menshevik and SR party members, mostly workers, were rounded up, the highest number of arrests at any one time.¹⁰⁶ In some cities the arrested workers were held as hostages, just as Dzerzhinsky had promised. There were no charges and no trials.¹⁰⁷ The official formulation was that they were "listed" after being taken away by the Cheka.

Without any pretext or explanation the Cheka arrested all members of the Menshevik CC and of the Menshevik Moscow party committee. Martov was put under house arrest; it would have been embarrassing to shut him up in a Cheka jail at the time of the founding of the Communist International. Of the CC members only David Dalin escaped arrest, since he was not staying at home. Worrying about Martov's health, he contacted a friend of Martov's who went to Lunacharsky, the moderate Moscow Bolshevik who was the people's commissar of education. (Unfortunately Dalin did not identify who that friend was.) Lunacharsky called Lenin in the presence of this friend and inquired about Martov. Lenin is reported to have said: "Martov is a very clever man. Let

¹⁰³ "Partiinaia Zhizn' (rezoliutsiia konferentsii predstavitelei PSR na territorii Sovetskoi Rossii)," *Delo naroda*, no. 1 (20 March 1919), 3.

¹⁰⁴ *CheKa*, p. 126.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

¹⁰⁶ These data were published in an underground appeal of the Menshevik CC which was smuggled out of Russia to independent Georgia and published there. See "V RSDRP. Vozzvanie (24 May 1919)," *Bor'ba*, no. 171 (1 August 1919). According to another source, the total number of arrests was approximately 3,000. See G. Krasinsky to P. Axelrod (13 June 1919), Axelrod Archive, file 25/XV; also in *Les Echos de Russie* (July 1919), pp. 25–27.

¹⁰⁷ Martov to Stein (3 June 1919), Nicolaevsky Collection, series 17, box 51, folder 4.

him sit [under arrest] (*puskai posidit*)."¹⁰⁸ The Cheka detachment spent several days in Martov's apartment and arrested everyone who came in.¹⁰⁹ He was treated fairly well, but lesser-known figures and scores of rank-and-file Mensheviks, SRs and Left SRs were subjected to miserable treatment in the Cheka jail.

With these decisive actions Dzerzhinsky showed Kamenev who had real power in Soviet Russia and what resolutions of the Moscow soviet were worth. The hard-liners' victory was total, since on 3 April the CEC condoned the arrests: "The task of Soviet power now is to wage a merciless struggle against the Mensheviks and SRs who have gathered around the newspapers *Vsegda Vpered* and *Delo naroda* (now closed) and who in reality are disrupting our struggle; who are allies of our enemies, because they are campaigning for strikes and for free trade and for cessation of the civil war."¹¹⁰ The CEC resolution did not annul the decree on legalization of the opposition parties, though. At least in theory they remained legal. But laws did not matter much in Soviet Russia. What mattered was a "revolutionary policy," or a decision at the top. At the end of May the terms of the "merciless struggle" were concretized somewhat, when a secret circular went out to the provinces urging the Cheka "to arrest all prominent Mensheviks and Right SRs, unless it was known that the individuals in question were ready to help us actively in our struggle against Kolchak."¹¹¹

The brutality of the Cheka operation and its large scale in many cities led the SR party leadership believe that their ten-day-long "legalization" was a Communist trap, a provocation. It was designed to induce the SRs to come out into the open, to reveal their identities and numerical strength in factories, cities, and provincial towns. Armed with this information, the Cheka hit back hard, violating an agreement signed barely a month earlier. The SR party leadership was not surprised about the turn of events. It had taken precautionary measures. Victor Chernov escaped arrest despite the Cheka's all-out effort to capture him. Many provincial organizations suffered casualties but quickly returned to underground activity shortly after the wave of arrests.

Reflecting upon the possible reasons for this Bolshevik action, most SRs believed that the Bolsheviks had discovered how unpopular they were in the country. Just as *Vsegda Vpered* had done in January, *Delo naroda* reached a circulation of 100,000 in a few days.¹¹² Peasant *khodoki* (literally, walkers) started to arrive to Moscow from the provinces to meet with Chernov and obtain a copy of the paper. Most importantly the SRs and the Mensheviks were greeted with enthusiasm by workers at rallies in Moscow and other cities.

¹⁰⁸ Dalin, "Otryvki Vospominanii" in Abramovitsch, ed., *Martov i ego blizkie*, pp. 111–12.

¹⁰⁹ The description of the ambush in Martov's apartment is in G. Krasinskii to Pavel Axelrod, Axelrod Archive, file 25/XV.

¹¹⁰ "Rezoliutsiia TsiK Sovetov," *Izvestiia*, no. 73 (4 April 1919).

¹¹¹ *Izvestiia TsKa RKP(b)*, no. 1 (28 May 1919), cited in *Perepiska Sekretariata*, vol. 6, p. 101.

¹¹² "God Zhizni Partii SR," *Narodovlastie*, no. 1 (1919), 62.

Railway strikers in Moscow and striking metalworkers in Tula as well as peasant rebels in Orel were putting forward Menshevik and SR slogans. The SRs were not wrong when they wrote:

We assert that the true reason for the latest attack on the party is its success among the masses of people, which was manifest from the moment of its "legalization." The Bolsheviks could not conclude an honest agreement with democracy, because for them this would have amounted to a voluntary departure from political scene. . . . Under the conditions not even of universal suffrage but simply of relatively free elections to the soviets, they would have had to face the prospect of being a modest opposition.¹¹³

The status of the opposition parties was a barometer of the Bolsheviks' overall policy. When reforms were contemplated in the direction of the rule of law, economic flexibility, and peasants' private enterprise, the policy toward opposition parties was one of relative toleration; when on the other hand the hard-line policy prevailed, repression followed toleration. There were several reasons for the Bolshevik's abandonment of a moderate course in early April 1919. First, foreign policy requirements did not press Lenin to maintain a democratic appearance in April 1919 as much as in November 1918. In Germany the Weimar Republic had been established, and hopes for a proletarian revolution there decreased with every passing week, especially after the Spartacist uprising of January 1919 ended in a fiasco. The German government was far more interested in the Western powers and their favors than in Soviet Russia. Soviet overtures to the Western powers did not bring desired results either. England and especially France were determined to help the Whites in their struggle to oust the Bolsheviks. It did not matter much whether socialist opposition parties were tolerated in Russia or not.

The "reform" of the Cheka demonstrated that the constellation of forces within the Bolshevik party did not favor the moderates. Provincial cliques, the Cheka, and military commanders—all wanted a hard-line policy toward the "petite bourgeoisie." Serious setbacks at the civil war front in the Urals in March made it apparent that the Bolsheviks' hold on power was precarious. The Communist leaders realized that they were dependent on the Red Army and the Cheka to stay in power. Perhaps the most important cause of the repressions in April, however, was the wave of strikes and uprisings in Bolshevik-controlled territory. These outbursts were so serious that they necessitate a closer examination of popular discontent in the spring of 1919.

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 162.

On the Internal Front: Enemies among the Workers

OF ALL SOCIAL GROUPS in Russia, workers have been traditionally portrayed as supporters of the Bolsheviks during the civil war.¹ The political system was officially defined as a dictatorship of the proletariat. The workers were supposed to be the beneficiaries of their own dictatorship over the bourgeoisie and the peasants during the civil war. The enemies of Soviet power were fought against in the workers' name. Without their support, the Communist government did not have a *raison d'être*. Thus the issue of workers' support had not only military and economic significance but also was a matter of ideological commitment for the Bolsheviks. Perhaps that is why a myth was born that workers chose to support the Communist government during the civil war. A close examination of workers' political behavior in 1919, however, suggests that the dynamics of the triangular relationship between the workers, the Bolsheviks, and the socialists was much more complex.

Studying workers' political attitudes during the civil war is a difficult undertaking. Workers did not record their views systematically. And when they did, as in some protest resolutions, these seldom became known, due to Bolshevik censorship. After the suppression of the opposition press in the summer of 1918, and except for a brief period from January to March 1919, there was no opposition press to cover views critical of the government. Workers' political preferences expressed in resolutions and published in the Communist press should be treated with caution, because Communist party cells systematically portrayed their own resolutions, prepared in advance, as genuine workers' views.² Neither can political aspirations be easily deduced from the voting record in the soviets, because the latter were packed with representatives of government-controlled agencies. The share of delegates elected by popular vote was so small in most cases that their voices could not be heard. A victory of

¹ Sheila Fitzpatrick wrote of the "active support of the urban working class" for the Bolsheviks in *The Russian Revolution*, p. 70, as did Thomas Remington, *Building Socialism in Bolshevik Russia*, p. 101. On the other hand, William Chase acknowledged "mass worker unrest" in Moscow but mistakenly saw it as beginning only at the end of 1920, after the victory over the Whites. See *Workers, Society, and the Soviet State*, p. 11.

² *Pravda* editors were concerned that workers were censored by the local party bosses. They cited numerous examples when workers did not dare write to *Pravda* without authorization from the local party cells. Hence the title of the article, "Can Workers Write in *Pravda*?" (*Mogut li rabochie sotrudnicat' v Pravde*), *Pravda* (4 February 1919), 2.

opposition parties in elections to the soviets almost automatically led to disbandment of the soviets.³

Elections to local bodies, such as factory committees and trade union boards, were a better barometer of popular attitudes, but data on such elections are sporadic and inconclusive. This is due partly to a deliberate effort by local authorities to suppress embarrassing information and partly to a severe disruption of communications during the civil war. Correspondence of the Bolshevik Central Committee (CC) with local organizations demonstrates that Moscow was poorly informed on the political events in the provinces. The Bolshevik CC had to rely on special emissaries from the center whose job was to investigate what had happened in a given locality and submit a report to the CC.⁴ These reports present popular attitudes in time-specific phraseology that makes it difficult to discern the real meaning of words and labels. Workers' strikes are seldom referred to as strikes but rather as antisoviet conspiracies. Workers were not supposed to have had critical views of "proletarian" authorities, and that is why workers' views were seldom reported. This paucity of information was acknowledged by the International Labor Office: "Difficult as it is to obtain information on labor disputes after the Communist revolution, it is still more so, if not well nigh impossible, to find out anything about strikes".⁵

A close scrutiny of Bolshevik, Menshevik, and SR legal and underground press and diplomatic reports makes it possible, however, to reconstruct the main contours of workers' political behavior during the height of the civil war with the Whites. Some Bolshevik orders, threats, and reports were published at the time. Much outspoken material can be found on the pages of *Izvestiia* and *Pravda*. Workers expressed their views in a variety of ways. They wrote letters to the Bolshevik and opposition press describing conditions at their factories. They drafted their own resolutions at meetings to which they had been summoned by Communist propagandists. They petitioned local authorities when they believed their rights were being violated. And, of course, they went on strike when they perceived that there was no other way to achieve their goals. As a last resort they took up arms and participated in uprisings. Workers' petitions, strikes, and riots can be seen as three stages of interest articulation, each successively more radical. Most of the more radical protests, riots, and uprisings

³ Brovkin, *The Mensheviks after October*, pp. 126–60.

⁴ Some of these reports have since become the richest source on local politics during the civil war in Russia. Of the numerous reports in this category, several stand out: (1) a report by the special emissaries of the NKVD to Tambov in March 1918—Shanukhin, Shirokov, and Butiugin, "Doklad emissarov Kommissariata Vnutrennikh Del," *Vestnik Kommissariata vnutrennikh del*, no. 9 (April 1918); (2) a report on the disbandment of the newly elected soviet in Sormovo—"Doklad v Kremle o sobytiakh v Sormovo," *Vecherniaia Zvezda*, no. 71 (21 May 1918), 3; and (3) a report by a political commissar on his measures against the Greens in the summer of 1919 in Smolensk Province—B. Ardaev, "Donesenie Roslavl'skomu Uezdvoenkomu" (6 August 1919), Smolensk Archive, file 119.

⁵ *The Trade Union Movement in Soviet Russia*, p. 168.

took place in the provinces; conversely more peaceful letters, resolutions, and strikes were common in the capitals.

The winter of 1918–19 was perhaps the harshest time of all during the years of war and revolution. Recent studies on the social composition of the labor force show its dramatic decline in the big cities.⁶ The decomposition of industry that had begun in 1917 accelerated in 1918 and reached truly catastrophic proportions during the winter of 1918–19. Shortages of electricity, raw materials, food, and skilled workers plagued industry and brought it to a virtual halt. Who, then, were the workers in the big cities at the time? It is clear from the available evidence that these were the workers who had nowhere to go. Many of them had been city dwellers for a long time. Some were skilled and some unskilled. Some were literate and well versed in politics; others, as is clear from their language, were semiliterate at best. This social group reflected the social diversity of the working class at large. It was the working class of 1918 minus those who had fled to the countryside, minus those who had joined or been drafted into the Red Army, and minus those who had made careers in the Communist party.

Recent research by social historians shows that the decrease in the number of workers in Moscow occurred primarily among men. Their numbers fell from 215,000 in 1918 to 124,000 in 1920. Two main groups left the city: one was the semiurban, unskilled workers, recent arrivals from the countryside who went back, and the other group was the young, mostly single, politically active, skilled workers. They went mainly into the ranks of the Red Army and the Bolshevik administration. The core of the remaining workers were family men, longtime residents of Moscow. Most importantly, they were “veteran urban proletarians,” the skilled metalworkers of Moscow.⁷ Since the Bolsheviks’ priority was to keep industry operating to fuel the war effort, the three main categories of workers who actually were present at their factories and worked sporadically were metalworkers at state war-industry plants, railway workers, and printers. In most cases these were the same workers who had been there in 1918 and in 1917. Diane Koenker concludes that these workers were less likely to support the Bolsheviks, due to their social characteristics.⁸ The workers who remained at the factories in 1919 were the ones who for one reason or another did not benefit from the possibilities for upward mobility offered by the Bolshevik party and the civil war. The cleavage between those who did and those who did not was one of the main sources of discontent in 1919.

In a letter to *Izvestiia* a Moscow Communist worker wrote that workers’

⁶ William Rosenberg, “Russian Labor and Bolshevik Power after October,” *Slavic Review*, vol. 44, no. 2 (Summer 1985), 213–39.

⁷ Diane Koenker discussed the composition of Moscow workers as a social group in her “Urbanization and Deurbanization in the Russian Revolution and Civil War,” *The Journal of Modern History*, vol. 57, no. 3 (September 1985), 424–50, here 437 and 443.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 442.

dissatisfaction could not be attributed simply to low food rations, because, he argued, food rations were not low in food-producing provinces, and yet workers there were just as unhappy as in Moscow. The true reason he saw in privileges granted to the Communists. They had only recently been promoted to positions of authority, and this bred resentment among workers. The author described them as a "gray and embittered mass," resentful that the upstarts were riding in automobiles and moving into large apartments. Numerous other Communists were alarmed by the fact that workers at their factories lacked political consciousness, as they put it. Workers did not understand or support Communist objectives.⁹ Some Communists' complaints about workers' attitudes were remarkably explicit: "It is bitter to hear how workers abuse [*ponosiat*] Soviet authorities. . . . They say it was better under the tsar."¹⁰ Another Communist, in a letter to *Izvestiia*, claimed that his factory had always been and still was a refuge of the Mensheviks.¹¹ A worker from the Duks factory admitted that "the majority of workers have counterrevolutionary views." And a Communist printer wrote that the printers were siding with the counterrevolution, meaning with the Mensheviks.¹²

Such assessments of workers' attitudes from below, by Communist activists in at least some factories in Moscow and Petrograd, find their counterpart in assessments from above. Grigorii Zinoviev was explicit in his speech at the Eighth CP Congress in March 1919: "Truly we cannot hide from ourselves the fact that in some places the word *commissar* has become a swear word. A man in a leather jacket [i.e., a Chekist] has become hateful, as they say now in Perm. To hide this would be laughable. We must face the truth".¹³

Pravda acknowledged that the speeches of Mariia Spiridonova, the leader of the Left SRs, who had just been released from prison in late 1918, and of Fedor Dan, a Menshevik leader, met with approval.¹⁴ Workers stormily applauded these opposition speakers when they condemned the privileges of the commissars at workers' rallies. A curious and rather revealing episode took place at one of the rallies in Petrograd. Anatolii Lunacharsky spoke for the Bolsheviks. Suddenly someone shouted from the floor: "Take off your fur coat!" Apparently it was cold in the hall, and Lunacharsky was comfortable with his fur coat on. The workers did not have fur coats, and someone who had was trying to pass as a

⁹ "Rabochaia zhizn' Pora opomnitsia," *Izvestiia* (5 April 1919), 4, and "O vystuplenii Spridonovoi," *Pravda* (6 February 1919), 4.

¹⁰ "Privykli chuzhimi rukami zhar zagrebat'. Presnenskii mekhanicheskii zavod," *Pravda* (18 February 1919), 4.

¹¹ "Na zavode Gracheva," *Izvestiia* (16 April 1919), 4.

¹² For the Duks factory, see "Rabochaia zhizn'," *Pravda* (5 July 1919), 4; for the printers, see "Belogvardeiskie vykhodki," *Pravda* (16 March 1919), 4.

¹³ *Vos'moi S'ezd RKP(b)*, p. 220.

¹⁴ "O vystuplenii Marii Spridonovoi" and "K vystupleniiu Dana na fabrike Dement," *Pravda* (4 February 1919), 4.

spokesman for workers' power. Lunacharsky was whistled at in derision and had to retire.¹⁵

Most reports in the Bolshevik and in the opposition press convey the atmosphere of discontent that was brewing among Moscow workers in early 1919. In a private letter the Menshevik leader B. O. Bogdanov, who in 1918 was one of the founders of the *uponomochennye* (plenipotentiary) movement, described his impressions of workers' attitudes right after the Mensheviks were legalized in January 1919:

Since yesterday we have finally begun party work. . . . I shall still have to attend meetings as in the good old times. In fact I have already begun doing so and, I must confess, very successfully. I have never had such a triumph. Of course this is due not so much to my oratorical talents as to the mood of the workers. There is great animosity toward the Bolsheviks. As soon as a Bolshevik mounts the platform, cries of "Clear out!" greet him, but when a Menshevik appears, before he has time to open his mouth, the audience begins to applaud.¹⁶

Similarly, the SR paper *Delo naroda* in one of its last issues in March reported that at a workers' rally of the Ryazan railway line a "forest of hands was raised for the SR-sponsored resolution" and only ten voted for the Bolshevik one.¹⁷ An identical account appeared in *Izvestiia* on elections to the factory committee of the Guzhon plant in Moscow. Workers did not let Communists speak and elected a factory committee consisting of "saboteurs," that is, members of the opposition parties.¹⁸

Since the summer of 1918 the Mensheviks, SRs, and Left SRs had not been allowed to openly address workers' rallies. They had been expelled from the soviets, and many of their leaders had been arrested. They now used their legalization, which turned out to be a short breathing spell, to present their critique of Bolshevik authorities. Workers did not seem to distinguish the nuances of differences between these parties' positions. In most cases they applauded with equal enthusiasm any speaker of the opposition parties. They heard what they wanted to hear: speeches against the Communists' privileges, unfair elections, unpaid wages, low food rations, the ban on trade, and endless

¹⁵ "Bol'shoi miting v narodnom dome," *Petrogradskaia Pravda* (14 March 1919), 2.

¹⁶ This letter was seized by the Cheka when it raided the office of the Menshevik CC paper, *Vsegda Vpered*, and was published in "Tupoumie ili prestupnaia demagogiia," *Petrogradskaia Pravda* (4 March 1919), 1. It was also published in "Workmen against Bolsheviks," *Bulletins of the Russian Liberation Committee*, no. 7 (5 April 1919). The Russian Liberation Committee was a group of Russian exiles in London who published some reprints from the Soviet press as well as their own political opinions. Inasmuch as can be judged, their views were close to those of the Kadet party.

¹⁷ "V Perovskikh masterskikh," *Delo naroda*, no. 9 (29 March 1919).

¹⁸ "Rabochoia zhizn' Sabotazhnyi zavkom," *Izvestiia* (22 June 1919), 4, and "Moskovskii metallicheski zavod, byvshii Guzhona," *Izvestiia* (1 July 1919), 4.

mobilizations for the civil war. Of all the opposition speakers, Mariia Spiridonova seems to have enjoyed a particularly enthusiastic reception. Her fiery speeches and uncompromising condemnation of Communist atrocities during the Red Terror drew enormous crowds during this short period of free speech in January 1919.¹⁹ Communists reported that workers referred to Spiridonova as Godmother (*Bogoroditsa*) or simply *matushka*—mother. The main themes of her speeches were well reflected in an underground Left SR leaflet that circulated in Petrograd in early 1919: “Where is the dictatorship of the proletariat and of the working peasantry? It has been supplanted by the dictatorship of the Bolshevik CC governing with the assistance of extraordinary commissions and punitive detachments.” The leaflet went on to say that the soviets were no longer elected in Soviet Russia: “Where are the promised rights of elections? At the factories and plants, at the ships and railroads, the self-appointed Bolshevik commissars are sitting! What has become of freedom of speech and of the press? . . . The laboring classes are not allowed to congregate. . . . They may not utter a word against the Bolsheviks under penalty of being arrested and shot.”²⁰

Communists wrote in *Pravda* that in view of the masses’ lack of political consciousness, which meant lack of support for the Bolsheviks, it was necessary to shut the mouth of Spiridonova and others. They labeled her speeches White Guardist propaganda, a stab in the back, treason, and a call for insurrection.²¹ Mensheviks, Left SRs, and SRs were called traitors, social Kolchakovites, Black Hundreds, and monarchists.²² It seems that local Communists tried to invent the worst possible label to stick on their opponents, regardless of whether it was accurate. This betrayed their fear of losing their position of authority in case a new factory committee was elected or if a given factory went on strike. The lower down the scale of authority a particular Bolshevik was, the more embittered he seems to have been against the socialists. City bosses were well protected by 1919: electoral mechanics guaranteed their security in power, unless an uprising broke out. Lower party functionaries, however, were still often thrown out at elections to factory committees, hence their insecurity and anger against the troublemakers.

One Bolshevik factory committee member, for example, related in *Pravda* how a worker, a Menshevik, incited the workers to elect a new factory committee. There was nothing unlawful in such a course of action, yet the author

¹⁹ For the Bolshevik commentary on Spiridonova’s speeches, see “Aresty sredi Levykh Eserov,” *Pravda* (13 February 1919), 3.

²⁰ “Indictment of Bolshevism: Russian Socialists’ Proclamation,” *The Times* (10 April 1919), 12.

²¹ E. Iaroslavskii, “Chego khotiat Levye Esery,” *Pravda* (6 February 1919), and K. Tverdovskii, “Snova avantiura,” *Pravda* (13 February 1919), 1.

²² For example in “Eshche o zavode, byvshii Guzhona,” *Izvestiia* (1 July 1919), 4, the Mensheviks are referred to as Black Hundreds; the SRs are likened to White Guards in “Raboचाia zhizn’,” *Pravda* (16 March 1919), 4.

presented the matter as if the very campaign to elect a new committee was tantamount to an anti-Soviet conspiracy. He tried to enlist the support of the authorities and cursed the Menshevik worker, Petrov, as a hidden Kolchakovite.²³ From a town in Rzhev in Tver Province the local Bolsheviks frankly wrote to their own Central Committee that they had decided against the continued existence of the city soviet, since it was in the Mensheviks' hands.²⁴ Clearly, the Bolshevik authorities would rather deal with a loyal Communist in charge than with an opposition-led soviet. Just as the newly elected soviets were disbanded in the spring of 1918, so the newly elected opposition-led soviets were being disbanded in the spring of 1919. A new hysteria against the opposition parties began to unfold as workers' protests became more articulate in the spring of 1919.

Strikes in Moscow

Letters to *Pravda* and to the opposition press describe workers' political attitudes, invariably from the perspective of the correspondent. Communist activists portrayed the grumbling workers as a "gray embittered mass" lacking political consciousness, applauding the Mensheviks, and sympathizing with Kolchak. Was this an accurate description? Workers' own resolutions and above all their actions provide a much more comprehensive picture of their political preferences. As did most strikes, the one at the Aleksandrovskii railway workshops broke out spontaneously at the end of February. The immediate cause of the strike was that workers were not paid 40 percent of the wages due to them for February. When it began, three thousand workers were present at a rally.²⁵ They did not let the representative of the authorities speak and demanded immediate pay and food rations equal to those of Red Army soldiers. The Bolsheviks agreed to fulfill this demand.²⁶ The workers were ready to resume work, and it looked as if the matter was settled. But soon it became known that on that same night the Cheka arrested the leaders of the proposed strike. Workers stopped work again and demanded their immediate release.²⁷ What had begun as an economic protest now turned into a political strike.²⁸

²³ That is, supporters of Admiral Kolchak, the supreme ruler of Russia (his official title), the leader of the White armies in Siberia. S. Petropavlovskii, "Prekrasnaia taktika," *Pravda* (11 March 1919), 4.

²⁴ "Document no. 426," *Perepiska Sekretariata*, vol. 6, p. 393.

²⁵ "Iz professional'nogo i rabochego dvizheniia," *Rabochii Internatsional*, no. 1 (11 March 1919). This was a paper of the Menshevik CC and was the first and only issue that came out.

²⁶ "Sudebnyi otdel. Delo o zabastovke na Aleksandrovskoi zheleznoi doroge," *Pravda* (23 May 1919), 4.

²⁷ "Iz professional'nogo i rabochego dvizheniia," *Rabochii Internatsional*, no. 1 (11 March 1919).

²⁸ "K zakrytiiu masterskikh Aleksandrovskoi zheleznoi dorogi," *Pravda* (1 April 1919), 4.

An official investigation into the causes of the strike showed that some representatives of Soviet authorities had distributed food and apartments unlawfully. "This made the workers angry."²⁹ The "enemies," according to *Pravda*, were using these unlawful actions as a pretext to incite the workers to strike. The elections to the Moscow soviet at the end of March aggravated the situation: the Aleksandrovskii railway workshops elected Mensheviks and SRs only. The candidates of the ruling party were defeated.³⁰ The Bolsheviks then embarked upon drastic measures: they occupied the workshops, evicted strikers by force, and shut down the workshops for the time being. The account in *Izvestiia* spoke of a possibility of bloodshed.³¹ On 31 March all workers were fired, and an announcement that new workers were to be hired was published in *Pravda*.³² According to opposition sources, though, some workers were killed.³³ A purge of the "counterrevolutionary elements," that is, of the socialists, was implemented, regardless of their actual participation in the strike. Twelve workers were put on trial by the Revolutionary Tribunal, chaired by the Cheka functionary Iakov Peters. The strikers were charged with "preparation of the strike and of the armed insurrection against Soviet power [*sic!*]."³⁴ They were all workers of long standing, some of them members of the Social Democratic or Socialist Revolutionary parties. All workers' meetings henceforth had to be reported to the Cheka in advance, and its representatives had to be present. Minutes of the proceedings were to be submitted to the Cheka.³⁵

It would be repetitive to relate the course of other strikes. Most of them were remarkably similar: economic demands, arrests of ringleaders, strikes, lock-outs, more arrests, purges, trials, and sometimes shootings—these were the main stages. In Moscow most active strikers in the spring of 1919 were railway workers, tram workers, and metalworkers.³⁶ Repressive measures were effective

²⁹ "Sud nad Aleksandrovtсами," *Pravda* (29 May 1919), 1; also a report to the State Department by Mr. Imbrie, the American consul in Vyborg, Finland. Of all reports on file in the Department of State for 1919–20, those of Mr. Imbrie are consistently the most thorough and well documented, especially on the situation in Petrograd. Imbrie, Vyborg, Finland, "Excerpts from Soviet Newspapers" (22 May 1919), Records, dispatch 861.00.4566–4567.

³⁰ "Vybory v Moskovskii Sovet," *Delo naroda*, no. 8 (28 March 1919), 2.

³¹ "Chrezvychainoe zasедanie Mossoвета," *Izvestiia* (5 April 1919), 3, and "Sredi zheleznodorozhnikov," *Pravda* (12 April 1919), 4.

³² "Raboचाia zhizn'. V Aleksandrovskikh masterskikh," *Pravda* (1 April 1919), 4. The same information is in Imbrie, Vyborg, Finland (7 April 1919), Records, dispatch 861.00.4227.

³³ "Sobytiia na Aleksandrovskikh masterskikh," *Severnaia Kommuna* (9 April 1919), 3; and Imbrie, Vyborg, Finland, "Excerpts from Soviet Newspapers" (22 May 1919), Records, dispatch 861.00.4566–4567.

³⁴ "Sudebnyi otdel. Delo o zabastovke na Aleksandrovskoi zheleznoi doroge," *Pravda* (23 May 1919), 4.

³⁵ "Liubopytnyi dokument," *Delo naroda*, no. 8 (28 March 1919), 2. In this article the SRs published an ordinance (*rasporiazhenie*) by the Cheka section of the Aleksandrovskii railway workshops to all employees which outlines these regulations.

³⁶ For information on the strike at the Bogatyr' factory in Moscow, see "Profsoiuzy kak kara-

for a short time, until some other burning issue ignited workers' protests again. On 24 June, for example, railway workers went on strike at the Aleksandrovskii railway workshops again. This time workers of several major lines joined them: the Northern, Moscow-Kazan, Kiev-Voronezh, and Kursk lines. What triggered protest this time was a decree ordering the mobilization of some workers into the Red Army. General Anton Denikin's offensive was gaining momentum, and the Bolshevik government had to throw all the resources it had into battle. At workers' rallies Bolshevik speakers tried to get the workers to vote for their resolution expressing enthusiasm for the heroic fight of the Red Army. Instead, workers whistled at Bolshevik speakers and chased them from the podium. The Aleksandrovskii railway workshops resolution read:

the authorities must restore freedom of the press and assembly; must abolish the death penalty and open the doors of prisons. . . . Until this is done, we regard Denikin's, Kolchak's, and the Communists' authority as equally shameful, because this authority is not the authority of the soviets, because nobody other than the Communists can be elected there, and if one [a non-Communist] is elected, he would wind up not in the soviet but in the Butyrki jail.³⁷

The Bolshevik press also spoke of heightened opposition among railway workers. At the railway workers' conference in June 1919 the workers' instructions (*nakaz*) to their delegates reiterated their main concerns: opposition to mobilization into the Red Army, the right to elect their own representatives, and freedom to purchase food. One of the demands read: "Down with the civil war!"³⁸

Available evidence on workers' attitudes in Moscow suggests that railway workers in particular as well as metalworkers were profoundly dissatisfied with Bolshevik economic policies and with the dictatorship of those who spoke in their name but without their consent. In contrast to the interpretations of social historians who tend to attribute workers' political behavior to social characteristics, the evidence just considered suggests that Moscow workers did not support the Bolsheviks and did support the opposition parties, not because they were family men and less radical, but because very concrete Bolshevik policies induced them, as politically active workers, to protest and articulate their demands. In Petrograd, consistent with the tradition of that city, workers' protests were much more radical.

tel'nye organy," *Vsegda Vpered*, no. 9 (18 February 1919), 1; on the strike at the Sokol'niki trampark, see *Bulletins of the Russian Liberation Committee*, no. 5 (24 March 1919), 2; on the Aleksandrovskii railway workers' strike, see Scheibert, *Lenin an der Macht*, p. 319.

³⁷ Quoted here from a report by a participant, "Rabochee dvizhenie v Moskve," *Listok "Dela naroda"*, no. 2 (n.d.), 4, PSR Archive, folder 2003.

³⁸ For the Bolshevik assessment of this *nakaz*, see "Zheleznodorozhniki i revoliutsiia" and "Konferentsiia zheleznodorozhnikov," *Izvestiia* (22 June 1919), 4.

Strikes in Petrograd

Petrograd was the scene of a powerful workers' protest movement in 1918. The independent Workers' Assembly of Plenipotentiaries led several important strikes in May and June 1918 and attempted to organize a general strike on 2 July 1918. Workers protested against the restriction of trade, grain requisitioning in the countryside, and, most importantly, against new rules for the elections to the Petrograd soviet, which guaranteed a Bolshevik victory irrespective of the popular vote.³⁹ It was in Petrograd that, for the first time, the Bolsheviks resorted to a lockout of the striking workers. The Obukhov plant was shut down in June 1918, and the workers were fired. After the suppression of the Workers' Assembly in July and the arrest of its leaders, the protest movement quieted down in the fall. Mass executions during the official Red Terror in the fall had an intimidating effect on Petrograd workers. Protests achieved nothing but intensified repression.

During the summer and fall, workers fled from Petrograd. From 150,000 workers in June 1918, the number fell to 136,000 at the end of 1918.⁴⁰ The workers' economic situation dramatically deteriorated during this period. This is amply documented by the calculations of the well-known statistician S. G. Strumilin. Workers' food rations were getting smaller, and they reached a level deemed inadequate to provide the nourishment enabling one to work. Workers' wages were almost always one or two months late. At the same time workers were well aware that the Communist bosses received a more generous food ration.⁴¹ According to Strumilin, during the elections to the Petrograd soviet in December 1918 voters' elementary rights were often violated. At some plants the bosses "elected" themselves to the soviet without any regard to the prescribed procedure. Some "elected" themselves from enterprises that had been closed—hence the nickname "dead souls"—and some falsified figures on the number of employed workers to obtain more seats on the soviet.⁴² No campaigning among different political parties as in June 1918 was possible. The outcome of elections combined with the economic trends and social inequality created new bitterness among the workers, which exploded in a rash of strikes in March 1919.

³⁹ For a detailed discussion of events briefly touched upon here, see Brovkin, "The Mensheviks under Attack," in *The Mensheviks after October*, pp. 220–56.

⁴⁰ Cited here from a detailed statistical chart calculated by S. Strumilin in his "Petrogradskaia promyshlennost' na pervoe ianvaria 1919 goda," *Statistika truda*, nos. 8–10 (April 1919), 17.

⁴¹ S. Strumilin, "Arbeitslohn und Arbeitsproduktivitaet in der Russischen Industrie," in *Lebensbedingungen Staedtischer Bevolkerung von 1917–1921*, vol. 4, section 2, in Temen, ed., *Arbeitsverfassung und Arbeiterschaft in der Sowjet Union zwischen den Kriegen*, here pp. 28–48.

⁴² S. Strumilin, "Vybory v Petrogradskii Sovdep v dekabre 1918 goda," *Statistika truda*, nos. 8–10 (April 1919), 23–27, here 27.

Often, when a dictatorship is loosened somewhat and freedoms are granted that were previously suppressed, an avalanche of protests can no longer be contained. This is exactly what happened in Petrograd in February–March 1919. When the leaders of the plenipotentiary movement were released from prisons, when the Menshevik, the Left SR, and the SR parties were partially legalized, when Mariia Spiridonova, released from prison, began a series of impassioned speeches at Petrograd plants, the workers' bitterness was ignited, and a powerful opposition movement flared up with more vigor than in 1918. Throughout January and February the Menshevik press reported the spectacular popularity of Mariia Spiridonova at Petrograd plants. The Bolsheviks granted their political opponents freedom of speech and then, scared by the consequences, decided to withdraw it. Left SR party leaders in most industrial cities, as well as Spiridonova in Moscow, were suddenly arrested at the end of February. The Revolutionary Tribunal charged Spiridonova with slandering Soviet power by referring to it as "commissarocracy." She was consigned to one year of isolation in a hospital [*sic!*].⁴³ These mass arrests of Left SRs sparked the protest movement in Petrograd.

Trouble started at the Erikson factory on 2 March, where workers evicted Zinoviev by force when he tried to address them. As on earlier occasions, the Putilov plant workers played the leading role. According to a top secret report of the Cheka, at a protest rally on 10 March the famous Putilov resolution was passed, and out of ten thousand present, only twenty-two abstained.⁴⁴

We, the workmen of the Putilov works and the wharf, declare before the laboring classes of Russia and the world, that the Bolshevik government has betrayed the high ideals of the October revolution, and thus betrayed and deceived the workmen and peasants of Russia; that the Bolshevik government, acting in our name, is not the authority of the proletariat and peasants, but the authority of the dictatorship of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, self-governing with the aid of Extraordinary Commissions, Communists and police.

We protest against the compulsion of workmen to remain at factories and works, and attempts to deprive them of all elementary rights: freedom of the press, speech, meetings, and inviolability of person.

We demand:

- I. Immediate transfer of authority to freely elected Workers' and Peasants' Soviets.

⁴³ "Delo Spiridonovoi," *Vsegda Vpered* (25 February 1919), 2. For data on the arrests of the Left SRs, city by city, see the Menshevik source "Opiat' Krasnyi Terror," *Vsegda Vpered*, no. 16 (14 February 1919), 1; Bolshevik sources are "Deiatel'nost' chrezvychainykh kommissii," *Petrogradskaia Pravda* (28 February 1919), 3, and "Aresty sredi Levykh Eserov," *Pravda* (13 February 1919), p. 3.

⁴⁴ "Svedeniia Sekretного Otdela Vecheka o partii Levykh Eserov," (Data of the Secret Department of the Vecheka on the Party of Left SRs), Ts.P.A., TsKa RKP(b), Fond 17, Opis' 84, Biuro Sekretariata, Document 43.

2. Immediate re-establishment of freedom of elections at factories and plants, barracks, ships, railways, everywhere.
3. Transfer of entire management to the released workers of the trade unions.
4. Transfer of food supply to workers' and peasants' cooperative societies.
5. General arming of workers and peasants.
6. Immediate release of members of the original revolutionary peasants' party of Left Socialist Revolutionaries.
7. Immediate release of Mariia Spiridonova.⁴⁵

According to Strumilin, the Putilov workers also demanded the abolition of any limitation on the amount of food allowed to be brought to Petrograd.⁴⁶ They also demanded an increase in their food rations, but not at the expense of other groups of the population.⁴⁷ This was a verbatim repetition of the Workers' Assembly demand in May 1918, when the Bolsheviks raised workers' rations at the expense of "nonproletarian" groups. It is virtually impossible to pinpoint which political party's views these demands reflected. In fact the Mensheviks, the SRs, and the Left SRs would have wholeheartedly supported all these demands. The differences among the socialist opposition parties were becoming blurred, at least for the time being. Only a positive reference to the October revolution, and an explicit reference to Mariia Spiridonova, indicates a strong Left SR influence.

Continuity is the best word to describe the nature of workers' demands between June 1918 and March 1919. Exactly as in 1918, workers' delegations were sent to other factories and plants, reviving the practice of the disbanded assembly of plenipotentiaries. Other factories and plants joined in the strike: the Skorokhod rubber factory, the Baltic shipbuilding plant, and the trampark.⁴⁸ At Siemens-Schuckert protests broke out when the workers found out that the factory committee had "elected" the plant's representatives to the trust of electrical enterprises without informing the plant's general meeting.⁴⁹ Workers at the Rechkin railcar-building plant went on strike on 13 March in protest against the transfer of some workers into a lower category of food rationing.⁵⁰ According to Strumilin, the strike spread to fifteen enterprises employing thirty-four

⁴⁵ Cited here from "Putilof Meeting," *The Times* (4 April 1919), 10. The editors identified this report as dated 21 March 1919. See also the text of this resolution in document 61 in *A Collection of Reports on Bolshevism in Russia*, p. 95.

⁴⁶ S. Strumilin, "Zabastovki v Petrograde," *Statistika truda*, nos. 8–10 (April 1919), 37–38. One-and-one-half pud was the limit established by the authorities. This was the major concession to workers during the protests in May 1918.

⁴⁷ Ibid. See also Remington, *Building Socialism in Bolshevik Russia*, p. 108, but he cites only the demands listed by Strumilin; see also A. V. Gogolevskii, *Petrogradskii Sovet*, p. 175.

⁴⁸ "Putilof Meeting," *The Times* (4 April 1919), 10. Also see "Russian Documents," *Struggling Russia*, vol. 1, no. 16 (28 June 1919), 230.

⁴⁹ Gogolevskii, *Petrogradskii Sovet*, p. 176.

⁵⁰ "Russian Documents," *Struggling Russia*, vol. 1, no. 16 (28 June 1919), 230.

thousand workers. Of those, 90 percent took part in the strike. The enterprises on strike included all major branches of industry: machine building, railcar building; electrical, textile, chemical, and rubber manufacturing; Putilov, Rechkin, Siemens-Schuckert, Baltic, Arthur Koppel, Skorokhod, and others.⁵¹ These were the largest plants in Petrograd. They accounted for most of the metal industry in the city. The strike embraced 50 percent of the total labor force in Petrograd.

Trouble at the Putilov plant, and especially the shouts "Down with the party dictatorship!" alarmed the Bolsheviks so much that Lenin himself came to Petrograd on 12 March and gave a speech at a huge rally at the People's House on 13 March.⁵² He adopted a conciliatory approach and promised to increase food rations. Workers were not appeased and demanded his resignation.⁵³ When Zinoviev tried to address the workers, he was greeted with shouts of "Down with the Jew!"⁵⁴ Lunacharsky had great difficulty in getting workers listen to him, and he finally promised that the Bolshevik government would resign if the majority of workers desired its resignation. The workers demanded that the Putilov plant resolution be published in the Communist party paper *Severnaia Kommuna*. Street rioting broke out in some places, and Bolshevik speakers trying to address the protesters were mobbed.⁵⁵ The situation was becoming precarious for the Petrograd Bolsheviks. On 14 March an extraordinary session of the Petrograd soviet debated the crisis. The measures adopted were much harsher than in a similar situation in June 1918. The Bolshevik speakers determined that the strike was the result of "subversive Left SR activity" and demanded that the Left SRs be treated as insurrectionists, under the decree on Red Terror. This provided for execution as a penalty for attempted insurrection. The soviet resolved to "clear the Putilov plant of White Guardists and speculators."⁵⁶

The Bolsheviks labeled the workers' protest in those terms because at stake

⁵¹ S. Strumilin, "Zabastovki v Petrograde," *Statistika truda*, nos. 8–10 (April 1919), 37. This is a conservative estimate. A British parliamentary report cites an "intercepted Bolshevik wireless message, which states that 60,000 workmen are on strike in Petrograd, demanding an end to fratricidal war and an institution of free trade." See "Summary of a Report on the Internal Situation in Russia," in *A Collection of Reports on Bolshevism in Russia*, document 54, p. 60.

⁵² For the dates on Lenin's presence in Petrograd, see editor's note to Lenin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 38, p. 520; for the text of his speech, see pp. 31–38. For a more detailed account, see "Bol'shoi miting v narodnom dome," *Petrogradskaia Pravda* (14 March 1919), 2. Soviet sources failed to note a negative reaction of the audience to Lenin's speech. See also Western reports such as "Strike against Bolsheviks," *The Times* (2 April 1919), 12.

⁵³ Ibid. Another source on this is American military attaché, Switzerland, "Summary of the Bolshevik Situation . . . during Week Ending 5 April 1919," Records, dispatch 861.00.4510, p. 4.

⁵⁴ "Putilov Meeting," *The Times* (4 April 1919), 10.

⁵⁵ Imbrie, Vyborg, Finland, "Telegram to Department of State" (19 March 1919), Records, dispatch 861.00.4105.

⁵⁶ Gogolevskii, *Petrogradskii Sovet*, p. 176.

were not just bread rations but the Bolsheviks' very legitimacy. Since the proletariat was in power, it could not protest against its own government, they reasoned. Objectively, the strikers were agents of the bourgeoisie in the ranks of the proletariat. The soviet resolution of 14 March declared that all those who did not want to work were to be fired without compensation.⁵⁷ The Left SRs were denounced as the "last detachment of the bourgeoisie," which had to be smashed. Meetings and rallies were banned. Anyone in possession of the Putilov resolution was arrested immediately.⁵⁸ Workers who refused to resume work were thrown out of their dwellings, and their food ration cards were taken away.⁵⁹ Suppression of the strike at three enterprises, at least, involved the use of armed force: at the Putilov plant, the Treugolnik rubber factory, and the Rozhdestvenskii trampark.⁶⁰

The Bolsheviks intended to deploy the Baltic Sea sailors, but they refused and voted at their meeting to join the workers instead.⁶¹ This posture of the Baltic Sea sailors is quite plausible in view of their past record: their solidarity with the Petrograd strikers in June 1918, their own abortive uprising in October 1918, and their widely known support for the Left SR party.⁶² The Petrograd authorities hurriedly brought additional forces into Petrograd: eighteen thousand men and 250 machine guns, according to an American intelligence report.⁶³ Strikers barricaded themselves at the Putilov plant, which was stormed and occupied. Those in possession of firearms were executed on the spot. The Left SRs printed an underground leaflet which shed some light on the details of this operation:

The Bolsheviks have opened fire on the meeting of workers at the Treugolnik factory.
The Bolsheviks have opened fire on the workers of the Rozhdestvenskii trampark.
There are hundreds of arrested Putilov workers.

A detachment of executioners from Gorokhovaia Street [the address of the Cheka]
dressed up as sailors have entered the premises of the Putilov plant.

Everybody! Defend the Putilov workers!

Down with the Autocracy of the Commissars!⁶⁴

⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 177.

⁵⁸ "Strike against Bolsheviks," *The Times* (2 April 1919), 12.

⁵⁹ "Petrograd Revolt against Soviet," *The Times* (3 April 1919), 14.

⁶⁰ The four sources on this are Gogolevskii, *Petrogradskii Sovet*, p. 178; "O novom prestuplenii Levykh Eserov v Petrograde," *Izvestiia* (18 March 1919), 5; Imbrie, Vyborg, Finland, Records, dispatch 861.00.4147; and "Petrograd Revolt against Soviet," *The Times* (3 April 1919), 14.

⁶¹ "Strikes in Petrograd," *Bulletins of the Russian Liberation Committee* (24 May 1919), 4.

⁶² I. Flerovskii, "Miatezh mobilizovannykh matrosov 14 oktiabria 1918 goda," *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia*, vol. 8, no. 55 (1926), 237. The author was a Baltic Fleet commissar in 1918. As he stated in this article, this abortive rebellion remained largely unknown.

⁶³ Imbrie, Vyborg, Finland (20 April 1919), Records, dispatch 861.00.4330.

⁶⁴ "Listovka Levykh Eserov," Ts.P.A., Fond 17, TsKa RKP(b), Opis' 84, Biuro Sekretariata, document 43, pp. 20–22.

The data on the number of arrests reported in the Soviet press and in the West are close enough. According to the *Times*, 300 arrests were made during the week after 16 March,⁶⁵ and suspected ringleaders were shot wholesale.⁶⁶ According to a Soviet source, 225 Left SRs were arrested in March, 75 of them at the Putilov plant.⁶⁷ The exact number of those shot is not known. Bolshevik newspapers published the names of 15 Left SRs who were executed. Some Western reports cited the figure of 12.⁶⁸ A letter from Petrograd, published in the West, did not provide an exact figure but simply stated: "A score or so of workmen were shot at the [Putilov] works."⁶⁹ The American consul's figure was the highest: in April, he reported, 200 workers were shot on orders from Zinoviev.⁷⁰ The findings in a recent study make this figure quite plausible: "The strike was suppressed and the Cheka went to work, holding summary trials. Many executions followed, taking place in a remote locality called Irinovka, near the fortress of Schlussemburg. The procedure was to line up the victims against the wall, blindfolded, and to shoot them down in batches by machine gun fire."⁷¹ The Bolshevik authorities publicly declared that the arrested socialists would be held hostages and that their fate would depend on the political behavior of the opposition parties.⁷²

All these measures—lockouts, plant occupations, arrests, shootings, executions, and the taking of hostages—had been practiced earlier. The truly new procedure in the aftermath of this strike was that the workers were forced to recant their sins.⁷³ A new ritual, which was to become so famous in the 1930s, was established in 1919: workers were forced to say publicly that they had been led astray by provocateurs and counterrevolutionaries. And this despite the fact that the Bolsheviks' own investigation showed that the management had been incompetent at many plants and that some workers' grievances were legitimate. The Bolsheviks now defined the role of management and workers explicitly. There was no talk anymore that the will of workers was the law for the CP. Now the task of management was to "create a truly dictatorial organ" that would

⁶⁵ "Strike against Bolsheviks," *The Times* (2 April 1919), 12.

⁶⁶ "Putilov Meeting," *The Times* (4 April 1919), 10.

⁶⁷ Gogolevskii, *Petrogradskii Sovet*, p. 178.

⁶⁸ "Les Ouvriers chez les Bolcheviks," *Bulletin Russe* (15 June 1919), 3, and "V Chrezvychainoi Komissii," *Petrogradskaia Pravda* (13 April 1919), 3.

⁶⁹ "Soviet Russia: A Letter from Petrograd," *Bulletins of the Russian Liberation Committee* (3 May 1919), 3–4.

⁷⁰ Imbrie, Vyborg, Finland (18 April 1919), Records, dispatch 861.00.4323.

⁷¹ Leggett, *The Cheka*, p. 313.

⁷² Data on workers being forced to work are in American military attaché, Switzerland, "Summary of the Bolshevik Situation . . . during Week Ending 5 April 1919," Records, dispatch 861.00.4510, p. 4; on taking hostages see "Na belyi terror otvetim krasnym," *Petrogradskaia Pravda* (9 April 1919), 1. See also "Strikes in Petrograd," *Bulletins of the Russian Liberation Committee* (24 May 1919), 4.

⁷³ Remington, *Building Socialism in Bolshevik Russia*, p. 110.

treat the workers as pupils. The party would teach the workers by dictatorial means what they were permitted to do.

Despite the severity of Bolshevik repressions, sporadic outbursts of workers' protests continued throughout the remainder of 1919. As in Moscow, the new wave of strikes came in June and July, in response to drafting into the Red Army. An eyewitness reported from Petrograd: "there were strikes on a large scale at the Putilov and Obukhov works. During the last strike known to me, on 11 July, at the Nikolayev [railway] engine workshops, there were six strikers killed and nineteen wounded."⁷⁴ Cheka boss Iakov Peters admitted that armed force had to be used at the Nikolayev railroad.⁷⁵

What looked at first like extraordinary emergency measures, such as plant occupations and shootings, were practiced systematically by mid-1919. Plants involved in nonmilitary production were simply shut down temporarily in the event of a strike.⁷⁶ Striking workers were either dismissed or drafted into the Red Army. A protester would become a soldier, and he would have to obey orders or face the prospect of being shot. At plants producing war matériel workers would be forced to work, as the American consul explained: "Up to 6 July, labor districts of Obukhov, Aleksandrovskii, and Putilov plants were under supervision of enforced detachments of Red police, and in recent times, owing to the strike inaugurated at Putilov plant, Red police were introduced inside the factory."⁷⁷ Underground reports from the factories said that workers were afraid to speak freely, that Communist cells were spying on everyone, trying to identify "counterrevolutionaries,"⁷⁸ and that elections could not be called anything dimly resembling real elections. Any objections were regarded with suspicion. Any attempts to resort to a more energetic protest resulted in the use of armed force, and new casualties.⁷⁹ The Bolsheviks were getting used to applying military solutions to social and political problems.

Trouble in the Provinces

In the spring of 1919 serious disturbances broke out in the provinces: strikes, general strikes, and uprisings. What distinguished them from the unrest in the capitals was that not just workers but soldiers, sailors, and peasants took part,

⁷⁴ "Labour Disadvantages," *The Times* (12 August 1919), 11–12.

⁷⁵ "Strike Movement in Petrograd," *Bulletins of the Russian Liberation Committee* (18 August 1919), 3. For an estimate of casualties in Petrograd in May and June 1919, see "Latest News from Petrograd," *Bulletins of the Russian Liberation Committee* (19 July 1919), 4.

⁷⁶ Imbrie, Vyborg, Finland, "Report on Conditions in Petrograd by an Agent Acting on Office Instructions" (20 July 1919), Records, dispatch 861.00.5111.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ "Labour Disadvantages," *The Times* (12 August 1919), 11–12.

⁷⁹ Imbrie, Vyborg, Finland, "Report on Conditions in Petrograd by an Agent Acting on Office Instructions" (20 July 1919), Records, dispatch 861.00.5111.

and the Bolshevik suppression was much more bloody. Peters, the Cheka boss, admitted that troops destined for the frontline war against the Whites had to be diverted to the internal front.⁸⁰ These disturbances were not the work of the Whites; rather they were manifestations of internal social and political tensions in Bolshevik Russia. Strikes and general strikes took place in Tula (armament and cartridge plants), Sormovo (locomotive plant), Bryansk (metallurgical plants), Tver (textile and metal industry plants), and Ivanovo-Voznesensk (textile industry), that is, in all major cities of the central industrial region.⁸¹ Red Army mutinies and rebellions which coincided with workers' strikes broke out in Orel, Bryansk, Smolensk, Gomel, and Astrakhan.

It is extremely difficult to reconstruct the course of events in these cities. For example, all we know of strikes in Ivanovo-Voznesensk is what local Communists themselves reported: that workers were grumbling, that Communist organizers were shouted at and prevented from addressing workers' rallies, and that attempts were made to strike.⁸² Communist authorities imposed a complete news blackout on strike activity. When the SR paper *Delo naroda* tried to publish an account of the strikes in Tula at the end of March, Communist censors prohibited this, and the paper came out with blank white columns under the title "Events in Tula."⁸³ The Bolshevik press did not write about what had actually happened in Tula and Bryansk either but simply condemned a "new counterrevolutionary conspiracy."⁸⁴ Events in Tula are reconstructed here on the basis of four sources. The first source, Soviet history books, presents the official version.⁸⁵ It is very short. It acknowledges that strikes did take place in Tula and Bryansk. These are said to have been instigated by Menshevik and Left SR provocateurs, who plotted to weaken Soviet power and render help to the advancing troops of Admiral Kolchak.⁸⁶ The trouble was so serious that Lenin found it necessary to dispatch Dzerzhinsky to Tula on 3 April to "liquidate" the strike.⁸⁷ What is conspicuously missing from this account is any explanation of why the strike broke out and what Dzerzhinsky did to "liquidate" the strike.

⁸⁰ Peters, "Komu oni pomogaiut," *Izvestiia* (12 April 1919).

⁸¹ For a brief discussion of strikes in Petrograd, Tula, and Astrakhan see, for example, Remington, *Building Socialism in Bolshevik Russia*, pp. 108–10, and the much more detailed Scheibert, *Lenin an der Macht*, pp. 319–21.

⁸² Document 431, *Perepiska Sekretariata*, vol. 7, p. 317.

⁸³ See "Belye Polosy," *Delo naroda*, no. 2 (21 March 1919), 1.

⁸⁴ Dzerzhinsky, Latsis, and Peters, the Cheka bosses, mentioned troubles in Tula and Bryansk in several articles, and nothing else was said in the official Bolshevik press. Latsis, "K zagovoru Levykh Eserov," *Izvestiia* (21 March 1919), 1.

⁸⁵ Spirin, *Klassy i partii*, pp. 308–10.

⁸⁶ Martyn Latsis, "K zagovoru Levykh Eserov," *Izvestiia* (21 March 1919), 1, and Peters, "Komu oni pomogaiut," *Izvestiia* (12 April 1919).

⁸⁷ "Rasporiazhenie Lenina sekretariu, 3 Aprelia 1919 goda," in Belov, ed., *Iz istorii Vecheke*, p. 270. See also Leggett, *The Cheka*, p. 319.

The second account, by the Tula Bolsheviks themselves, provides more information and contradicts somewhat the official version.⁸⁸ According to this report, strikes at the armaments and cartridge plants broke out in early March and then again in the first days of April, when the railway workers joined the metalworkers, thus turning the plant strikes into a general strike. This explains why it was exactly on 3 April that Lenin urged Dzerzhinsky to "liquidate the strike" in Tula. What caused the strike, the Tula Bolsheviks reported, was the arrest of the Mensheviks and SRs. Unfortunately the Tula Bolsheviks did not explain why they decided to arrest the Menshevik and SR workers, but the sequence of events is important: first the arrests, then the strike. At certain points the frankness of the report is simply surprising: "the masses were following the Mensheviks." The Communist party was very weak among the Tula workers: out of several thousand employed workers, there were only 228 Communists in the entire city organization. Those who were officially listed as Communist sympathizers were in fact "very unstable." The Tula Communists criticized themselves for not being able to "knock the ground from under the Mensheviks," but they pointed to extenuating circumstances: "the social milieu in Tula was not favorable to Communist construction. The fact that the Tula workers follow any opposition, in this particular case the Mensheviks, so readily can be explained by their social origin: a worker at the armaments or cartridge plants here is not a pure proletarian. He is firmly connected to the village." In other words, the workers' petit bourgeois consciousness was at the root of the problem. Apparently in order to combat this consciousness, the Tula Bolsheviks prohibited workers from owning plots of land in the surrounding countryside, thus undermining severely the workers' capacity to supplement their poor food rations.

The Tula Bolsheviks frankly described the workers' oppositional attitudes, but they withheld information from the Central Committee on the workers' deteriorating economic conditions—the main cause of the strike—and said virtually nothing about the extent of the repression. On 22 February 1919 the head of the Labor Statistics Department gave a report to the Tula Communist leaders on the workers' economic situation.⁸⁹ He compared the absolute minimum of food necessary for a worker with what the Tula workers had actually been getting over the preceding several months. The trend was alarming. The cost of a food ration for a single (unmarried) worker in November 1918 was 14 rubles and 42 kopeks a day; in December it climbed to 16.47, and in January 1919 to 23.56. That meant that wages for the lowest-paid, single workers

⁸⁸ It appeared several months after the strike in an official report of the Tula Province CP Committee to the CC in an internal Communist party publication: "Iz otcheta deiatel'nosti Tul'skoi gubernskoi organizatsii za mart i aprel' 1919 goda," *Izvestiia TsKa RKP(b)*, no. 3 (4 July 1919), 4.

⁸⁹ "Prozhitochnyi minimum v gorode Tule. Doklad tovarishcha Berlina, zaveduiushchego podotdelom statistiki, Tul'skogo otdela truda," *Statistika truda*, no. 5–7 (March 1919), 35–36.

covered only 42 percent of bare minimum needs; wages for a worker providing for a two- or three-member family covered 30 percent of needs in November 1918 and 18 percent in January 1919. The statistician admitted that the quality of food distributed to workers at those fixed prices was falling dramatically and that an ever larger share of food had to be bought at ever increasing prices on the free market.

Amid the workers' increasing frustration any incident or case of perceived injustice could have provoked protests. As in other cities, workers in Tula complained that the Communists, Red Army soldiers, and the Cheka were well supplied with food. In the beginning of February those who complained were arrested as provocateurs, and the first wave of strikes broke out. According to a participant, a Tula worker, the strike started after the authorities arrested the Mensheviks and SRs.⁹⁰ The Bolsheviks shut down the plant, and a great many workers were fired. Several days later rehiring began. "Provocateurs" and "troublemakers" were kept out. Hungry and intimidated, the workers returned to the plant. But in mid-March the strikes resumed.

This time the main demand was that the food rations take workers' families into account. Indeed, the Tula Labor Statistics Department figures show that the most critical situation confronted workers with families. At a large rally workers demanded that the city soviet chairman, Grigorii Kaminsky, give an account on the food supply situation. He was forced to attend the rally and had to listen to workers' bitter speeches about the privileges the commissars enjoyed while workers' children went hungry. Some speakers called for reconvoction of the Constituent Assembly. Shouts were heard: "Down with the commissars! Down with the soviets!"⁹¹ Kaminsky promised to improve the workers' situation, but that same night the Cheka arrested two hundred worker activists.⁹² This understandably ignited more protests and clashes, and at that point Lenin dispatched Dzerzhinsky to "liquidate" the strike.

In contrast to the official version of these events, a Tula worker—the third source—reported that the more experienced anti-Bolshevik workers warned other workers in mid-March *against* further strikes, because these would be fruitless. The Tula Menshevik committee also tried to prevent the strike, fearing that it would lead to severe repression and bloodshed.⁹³ Contradicting the assertions of the Cheka functionaries, *Pravda* likewise admitted that the Mensheviks urged the workers not to strike.⁹⁴ Yet neither *Pravda* nor any other

⁹⁰ This unique document was published in a Siberian newspaper on the White-held territory after the author was taken prisoner of war at the front. "Chto delaetsia v Tule," *Nasha zaria*, no. 185 (26 August 1919).

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² According to Peters, the Cheka functionary, there were 40. Peters, "Komu oni pomagaiut," *Izvestiia* (12 April 1919).

⁹³ "Pis'mo v redaktsiiu," *Delo naroda*, no. 10 (30 March 1919), 3.

⁹⁴ "O Men'shevikakh," *Pravda* (6 April 1919).

published source revealed exactly how the strike was "liquidated," to use Lenin's expression.

This we learn from the fourth and most thorough source on the Tula strike: the secret reports to Lenin by special plenipotentiaries. The author of the first report was not identified; the second was written by a member of the NKVD Collegium, V. P. Antonov. His report admitted that the Menshevik and SR organizations in Tula "were very strong" and that they managed to "provide an outlet for the discontent of the masses by their demagogic agitation." Antonov equated the Mensheviks and SRs with Black Hundreds and did not hide his intense hostility to them. All the more revealing is his admission of their political strength.⁹⁵ Like all accounts, this one confirmed that on 23 March the Tula Bolsheviks arrested 23 Mensheviks and SRs. They were mostly members of the Menshevik and SR city party committees and prominent leaders of a local trade union of metalworkers. In response to this action the trade union summoned a city conference of metalworkers. The Bolsheviks were worried because the conference had the authority to speak on behalf of the Tula workers. According to the unnamed author of the first secret report, local Bolsheviks decided that if the conference adopted a resolution in favor of a strike, it would be necessary "to arrest the entire conference immediately. This decision was adopted unanimously by the soviet and the city [Communist] party committee."⁹⁶

Cheka agents appeared at the conference and arrested some more prominent trade union leaders. It does seem that the Bolsheviks were deliberately provocative. They were worried because the Mensheviks and SRs had established contact with Red Army soldiers "who were expressing discontent also."⁹⁷ The unnamed author of this report criticized the actions of the Cheka at the conference in hindsight: "We could have started the arrests immediately anyway, not at the plants, but in their homes. We could have arrested all those we needed to."⁹⁸ On 3 April the plants stopped once again in protest against the arrests at the conference. In retaliation the province CP committee, the Military Commissariat, and the EC of the soviet formed a troika to "liquidate the strike." They armed all Communists at both plants, a total of four hundred people, and occupied the plants with the help of a detachment of International-

⁹⁵ Predsedateliu Sovnarkoma tovarishchu Leninu, "Doklad chlena kollegii NKVD Antonova o sobytiiakh v Tule s 30 Marta po 10 Aprelia" (To the chairman of the Council of People's Commissars comrade Lenin, A report of the member of the NKVD Board Antonov on the events in Tula from 30 March to 10 April), Ts.G.A.O.R., Fond 130, SNK, Opis' 3, document 363.

⁹⁶ Predsedateliu Sovnarkoma tovarishchu Leninu, "Doklad o polozhenii na Tul'skom oruzheynom i patronnom zavodakh s 14 marta po 10 aprelia" (A report on the situation at the armaments and cartridge plants in Tula from 14 March to 10 April), Ts.G.A.O.R., Fond 130, SNK, Opis' 3, document 363.

⁹⁷ A report of the member of the NKVD Board Antonov on the events in Tula from 30 March to 10 April, Ts.G.A.O.R., Fond 130, SNK, Opis' 3, document 363.

⁹⁸ A report on the situation at the armaments and cartridge plants in Tula from 14 March to 10 April, Ts.G.A.O.R., Fond 130, SNK, Opis' 3, document 363.

ists, that is, foreigners in the service of the Cheka. The strike committee organized a street procession trying to attract Red Army soldiers to their side. Railroad workers joined the strike. New arrests followed. On 8 April "all the demagogues and hooligans" were arrested. Ten thousand workers, a third of the work force, returned to work at this stage. The problem the Bolsheviks faced was that it was difficult to get rid of all active strikers, because they were the most skilled workers and could not be replaced immediately.⁹⁹ Antonov's report concurred, and yet he recommended that the Communists "decisively remove all the Mensheviks and SRs, transfer the arrested members of the Tula city committees of these parties to Moscow, and exile all others out of Tula Province."¹⁰⁰

Even this detailed top secret report to Lenin failed to mention how many Tula workers were arrested and deported. According to the Tula Mensheviks' report to their own Central Committee, from 30 March to 15 April one thousand workers were seized.¹⁰¹ The general strike was suppressed brutally. Some workers fled to nearby villages. Military discipline was established at the plants, and as usual a screening and purge of socialists from the workers' ranks was carried out. Even though "order" was outwardly restored, many workers were reportedly beginning to wonder whether a victory of the Whites would really be worse. This attitude among the Tula workers threw the Bolsheviks in Moscow into panic in October 1919, when the forces of General Denikin took Orel and were approaching Tula.

Strikes in Sormovo and Tver

Like the armaments plant in Tula, the locomotive plant in Sormovo was a hotbed of opposition to the Bolsheviks throughout 1918. The leading role here was traditionally played by the SRs. The strikes in the spring of 1919 were almost an identical replay of what we have already seen in Tula, Petrograd, and Moscow. Workers' resolutions in Sormovo, as elsewhere, demanded a cessation of the civil war, fair elections, abolition of privileges for Communists, and convocation of the Constituent Assembly. In a familiar pattern the plant was shut down, and thirty worker activists were arrested. The authorities deducted food rations for every strike day from the strikers' rations and openly announced that only those supporting Soviet power would receive the food ration.¹⁰² This

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ A report of the member of the NKVD Board Antonov on the events in Tula from 30 March to 10 April, "Ts.G.A.O.R., Fond 130, SNK, Opis' 3, document 363.

¹⁰¹ "Pis'mo Tul'skoi organizatsii RSDRP" (15 April 1919), Ts.P.A., Fond 275, TsKa RSDRP, Opis' 1, document 190.

¹⁰² This is a report by a worker, a participant in the strike. "Iz nastroenii rabochikh, Nizhegorodskaiia guberniia," *Listok "Dela naroda"*, no. 2 (n.d.), 4, PSR Archive, file 2003. See also "Rabochie volneniia v Sormovo," *Otechestvo*, no. 216 (2 October 1919).

method of dealing with the strike demonstrated only too well how vulnerable the workers were to economic control by the authorities.

In Tver the authorities also managed to break down the strike movement, without bloodshed as the official report boasted, by means of intimidation and economic pressure. As in Tula, strikes in Tver in June 1919 turned into a general strike: the textile mills, the railcar plant, the tramlines, the printing shops, and all city services went on strike, a total of twenty-nine enterprises.¹⁰³ As in Moscow, strikes began in protest against an order, which came out in June, that 10 percent of the labor force be mobilized into the Red Army.¹⁰⁴ The workers also demanded that a miserable food ration—three-quarters of a pound a day—be increased and that fair elections to the soviet be held. These and other workers' demands are known only because a special commissar, V. I. Nevsky, dispatched from Moscow to "liquidate" the strike, reported them to the Bolshevik CC.¹⁰⁵ He admitted that the workers' complaints about unfair food distribution were justified, as was their demand to hold new elections. He characterized the workers' economic demands as SR in nature—that restrictions on trade be lifted and grain requisitioning in the countryside be stopped. Most importantly, Nevsky reported that the workers had presented political demands as well. They demanded a government that would "put an end to [*unichtozhit'*] the one-party dictatorship."¹⁰⁶

Nevsky's report produced the impression that at least some of the workers' concerns were legitimate grievances. He wrote that the local commissars detached themselves from the masses and that they "did not enjoy the trust of the workers." He felt that some workers' demands could be fulfilled but that the strike had to stop immediately and unconditionally.¹⁰⁷ The Tver workers, on the other hand, wanted their demands to be fulfilled first, and then they would negotiate about ending the strike. On 18 June all twenty-nine enterprises were on strike. As in 1918, the Tver workers elected a council of plenipotentiaries from the factories and plants, consisting of 150 representatives, and entrusted it to negotiate with the authorities.¹⁰⁸ The council established contact with the local Red Army soldiers, and they promised not to take part in suppressing the strike.¹⁰⁹ Nevsky's main concern when he arrived in Tver was to prevent a huge workers' demonstration and a rally in the center of the city. The strikers who had printed the announcement of the rally were arrested. Nevsky met with the representatives of the strikers and presented them with an ultimatum.

¹⁰³ "Likvidatsiia zabastovki v Tveri," *Izvestiia Petrogradskogo Soveta* (28 June 1919), 2.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.* It is curious that the Bolsheviks published such an embarrassing fact.

¹⁰⁵ V. I. Nevskii, "Tverskaia Zabastovka," *Izvestiia* (1 July 1919), 1.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ "Tverskie sobytiia, Beseda s tovarishchem V.I. Nevskim," *Izvestiia* (28 June 1919).

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ "Vseobshchaia zabastovka," *Listok "Dela naroda"*, no. 2 (n.d.), 8, PSR Archive, folder 2003.

Unfortunately he did not report what exactly the conditions of the ultimatum were, only that he had threatened to resort to “decisive measures.”¹¹⁰ The council of plenipotentiaries debated this ultimatum all night long and finally decided to accept Nevsky’s conditions. They agreed to a mobilization of 10 percent of the labor force into the Red Army, and they agreed to stop the strike immediately, but they failed to convince the rank and file to accept this decision. The representative of the Tver Menshevik party committee, Leikart, also declared that he was against the strike and urged the workers to go back to work.¹¹¹ Nevsky admitted that the Tver workers were more radical than the council of plenipotentiaries, which lost the leadership of the strike. Nevsky did not explain in his report what “decisive measures” to suppress the strike he undertook, except that “*this time*,” (emphasis is mine) “not a single shot was fired.” With all the similarity to strikes in other cities, what is remarkable about the pattern of strikes in Tver is that the authorities initially negotiated with the strikers, the workers managed to organize themselves and elect their own representatives, and they established contact with Red Army soldiers. As we shall see in Orel and Bryansk, unrest flared up simultaneously among workers, peasants, and Red Army soldiers’, which made it particularly dangerous for the Communist authorities.

Rebellions and Mutinies in Orel Province

The farther away from Moscow the province, the more ruthless were the local commissars and the more arbitrary was their rule, especially if the area in question was close to the quickly shifting front line of the civil war with the Whites, and if the bulk of the population were peasants. This was the socio-political mix in the black earth region, south of Moscow, bordering on Ukraine and the cossack lands. Kursk, Tambov, Voronezh, and Orel provinces were hotbeds of rebellion throughout the civil war years. Among the main reasons for this were Bolshevik economic policies—grain and horse requisitioning and attempts to organize peasant communes—but most importantly was the arbitrary nature of the local Communists’ rule. Orel Communists had to admit to the Bolshevik CC that drunkenness among the local Communists was rampant.¹¹² The Orel Communists objected strenuously when Moscow issued a circular on the legalization of the Menshevik party.¹¹³ The local Communists responded that it was dangerous to legalize the opposition parties because in a

¹¹⁰ “Tverskie sobytiia, Beseda s tovarishchem V.I. Nevskim,” *Izvestiia* (28 June 1919).

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² A letter of the Orel Communist Party City Committee to the CC (received 4 February 1919), *Perepiska Sekretariata*, vol. 6, p. 226.

¹¹³ “Orlovskomu Gubernskomu Komitetu RKP(b)” (26 February 1919), *Perepiska Sekretariata*, vol. 6, pp. 100–101.

city like Orel there was no social base for Communists to rely upon. It was a petit bourgeois city without any plants or workers.¹¹⁴ The local Cheka arrested the Orel correspondent of the Menshevik newspaper, which was still legally coming out in Moscow.¹¹⁵ If there were those who dared to criticize, they were dealt with severely. The Orel *Izvestiia* reprinted a decision of one uезд Communist party cell: "Karachevskii Uezd. Communist party of the Bolsheviks condemns citizen Moisei Makarovich Zelenko to death for evil actions designed to undermine the authority of the party and of the authorities. Execution of the verdict is declared to be a duty of any Communist who would meet Zelenko anywhere."¹¹⁶

In the city of Bryansk, a metallurgical center, the situation was certainly not as bad as in Karachevskii Uezd. The Menshevik and Left SR party existed legally and still had their representatives in the local city soviet.¹¹⁷ The Moscow Bolsheviks admitted that the opposition socialist parties had had an overwhelming preponderance in the Bryansk area "until very recently."¹¹⁸ As in other cities, the opposition parties campaigned for abolition of the Cheka, free elections to the soviets, and cessation of grain requisitioning. These resolutions were later construed to have represented a call for an armed insurrection. Whenever trouble broke out, local Communists almost always reported to Moscow that strikes and rebellions were the work of Menshevik, Left SR, or SR provocateurs and agitators. A local Bolshevik reported to Moscow that the uprising in Bryansk was the work of Left SR adventurers, whose slogan was Down with the Commissars and Jews!¹¹⁹ The Moscow emissaries were sometimes reluctant to accept such an easy explanation and tried to investigate whether local Communists were guilty of any misdeeds, as Nevsky had done in Tver. According to a special Cheka emissary who investigated the Red Army soldiers' mutiny and the peasants' rebellion: "It was caused by the abuse of authority on the part of some representatives of Soviet power and by the incitement of the kulaks. For example, comrade Kiselev came to a village to requisition horses, and to the question of peasants 'How many horses are needed?' he answered, 'I will take as many as I please.'"¹²⁰

Despite the fact that it was convenient for both the Moscow Communists and

¹¹⁴ "Ot Orlovskogo Gubernskogo komiteta" (18 February 1919), *Perepiska Sekretariata*, vol. 6, p. 311.

¹¹⁵ "Protest TsKa RSDRP," *Vsegda Vpered*, no. 13 (22 February 1919). See also "Protiv Menshevikov," *Vsegda Vpered*, no. 9 (18 February 1919).

¹¹⁶ "Smertnyi prigovor kommunistam," *Vsegda Vpered*, no. 5 (12 February 1919).

¹¹⁷ On the numerical strength of opposition parties in the Soviet, see *Vsegda Vpered*, no. 4 (11 February 1919), 4.

¹¹⁸ G. Kirev, "Volki v ovech'ei shkure," *Izvestiia*, no. 103 (18 May 1919), 1.

¹¹⁹ "Doklad predsedatelia Dmitrovskogo Ispolkoma Kurskoi gubernii," Ts.P.A., Dzerzhinsky Archive, Fond 76, Opis' 3, document 49.

¹²⁰ "V Vserossiiskuiu Chrezvychainuiu Komissiiu ot tovarishcha Zhukova, kopiia v TsKa RKP(b)," Ts.P.A., Fond 17, RKP(b), Opis' 6, document 197, p. 105.

the local autocrats to blame "agitators," sometimes articles in *Pravda* and high-ranking Communists admitted that the real cause of rebellions was the misdeeds of local Communists. The immediate cause of the rebellions in Orel Province in March and April *Pravda* saw not in Menshevik agitation but in the failures of the local authorities.¹²¹ The supply of heating fuel disappeared almost completely in Orel even though local authorities had locomotives and railcars at their disposal, and the province's Red Army soldiers did not receive even a third of the food rations due to them, because of the negligence of the Province Military Committee.¹²² Similarly, distribution of bread rations at the Bryansk plant stopped altogether.¹²³ In the city of Orel a Red Army soldiers' mutiny broke out, and in Bryansk workers went on strike. In Orel the local Cheka took eight hostages from among the socialists.¹²⁴ Two of them were Mensheviks, Glukhov and Kogan.¹²⁵ A special operations headquarters was set up to suppress the uprisings of workers, soldiers, and peasants.¹²⁶ The Cheka agent reported that on 8–10 March rebellious Red Army units were killing Communists. Their slogans were: Down with the Soviets! Beat the Jews!¹²⁷ Fighting must have been heavy, since Peters wrote in *Izvestiia*: "Reinforcements designated for the front line are used up for the liquidation of the uprising."¹²⁸ In Bryansk some units refused to obey orders and went over to the side of insurgents instead.¹²⁹ Despite heavy reinforcements from the front it took the Bolsheviks at least a month—from mid-March to mid-April—to suppress the movement by means of special troikas and merciless executions.¹³⁰ Communist sources do not say anything about casualties, understandably. According to an SR source, 152 workers were arrested at the Bryansk plant and transferred to the Butyrki jail in Moscow.¹³¹ Casualties incurred during the fighting with the soldiers and the rebels were estimated to have reached several thousand.¹³²

Events in Orel Province in the spring of 1919 suggest that our understanding

¹²¹ "Besporiadki v Orle i Bryanske," *Pravda* (21 March 1919), 1.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ "Prodoovol'stvie mashinostroitel'nykh zavodov," *Izvestiia* (20 February 1919), 4.

¹²⁴ "Besporiadki v Orle i Bryanske," *Pravda* (21 March 1919), 1. On taking hostages, see also Editorial in *Delo naroda*, no. 2 (21 March 1919).

¹²⁵ Ia. Miakotin, "K sobytiyam v Bryanske," *Delo naroda*, no. 9 (29 March 1919).

¹²⁶ "K sobytiyam v Bryanske," *Delo naroda*, no. 3 (22 March 1919), 2.

¹²⁷ "V Vserossiiskuiu Chrezvychainuiu Komissiiu ot tovarishcha Zhukova, kopiia v TsKa RKP(b)," Ts.P.A., Fond 17, RKP(b), Opis' 6, document 197, p. 105.

¹²⁸ Peters, "Komu oni pomagaiut," *Izvestiia* (12 April 1919).

¹²⁹ "Chto delaetsia v Tule," *Nasha zaria*, no. 185 (26 August 1919).

¹³⁰ "Ot Orlovskogo Gubernskogo komiteta" (18 May 1919), "Doklad o rabote Orlovskogo Gubernskogo Komiteta RKP(b) za aprel' i pervuiu polovinu maia," *Perepiska Sekretariata*, vol. 7, p. 416.

¹³¹ "V Moskovskoi Butyrskoi tiur'me," *Volia Rossii* (18 December 1920).

¹³² Imbrie, Vyborg, Finland, "Intelligence Report" (26 May 1919), Records, dispatch 861.00.4587.

of the civil war as a war between the Bolsheviks and the White armies should be reconsidered. A civil war was raging on the supposedly Bolshevik-controlled territory as well, a war between the Communist authorities and peasants, soldier-deserters, and workers—a war on the internal front. The closer the rebellious area was to the forces of the Whites, just across the front line, the more brutal was the suppression on the internal front.

The Astrakhan Tragedy

Located on the steppes of the lower Volga, between the lands of the Don and Orenburg cossacks, Astrakhan—this provincial fishing town on the periphery of European Russia—acquired great strategic importance in the spring of 1919. It lay in the area of a possible juncture of the forces of Admiral Kolchak, advancing to the Volga from the Urals, and General Denikin, whose forces were just beginning to unfold their historic offensive from the North Caucasus that would bring them to the threshold of Moscow by October. The Communist high command decided that Astrakhan had to be held at whatever cost, to prevent a linkup of the White armies. Perhaps that is why the workers' strike and the soldiers' mutiny there in March 1919 were suppressed with such exceptional brutality.

To this day the tragedy in Astrakhan remains largely unknown. The authorities imposed a complete news blackout, and the Communist press in the capitals did not even mention that anything had happened. Soviet histories do acknowledge that what they call a White Guardist rebellion took place and that these enemies attracted "backward elements of workers."¹³³ The rebels are said to have disarmed a part of the Forty-fifth Regiment, seized the building of the local party committee, and installed machine guns in some towers. For two days "intense machine gun fire" was going on in the city.¹³⁴ Nothing is said about what caused the insurgency, who the enemies were, or how many were killed during the "intense machine gun fire."

Fortunately, accounts by the Astrakhan Communists themselves and by the local SRs shed some light on the course of events in Astrakhan. Three familiar causes can be ascertained to have triggered the workers' brewing discontent into a strike and a rebellion. First, the workers' food rations were lower than those of sailors, and they demanded that they be given an equal food ration. Second, at protest rallies at the end of February some vociferous protesters were arrested, which electrified the situation.¹³⁵ And third, as in Tver and Bryansk, soldiers newly drafted from the labor force had no desire to be sent to the front. In the

¹³³ *Ocherki istorii Astrakhanskoi oblastnoi organizatsii KPSS*, p. 189.

¹³⁴ "Ot Astrakhanskogo Gubernskogo Komiteta RKP(b)" (May 1919), *Perepiska Sekretariata*, vol. 7, pp. 371–73.

¹³⁵ Victor Chernov, "Krovavoe delo" (newspaper clipping), Nicolaevsky Collection, no. 7, PSR, folder 64.

first days of March work came to a halt at several metal industry war plants.¹³⁶ At a session of the trade unions' council sailors' representatives announced that they would not move against the workers. According to the Astrakhan Communists' report, workers at rallies would not let the Communists open their mouths: "Everybody was waiting for an insurrection of the internal enemy—of the masses who lacked political consciousness," they wrote.¹³⁷ Although Soviet official histories speak of White Guardists, the Astrakhan Communists identified the masses as the enemy. As in Tver, workers' elected representatives presented their demands to the authorities. They called them an ultimatum: food rations had to be increased, free purchase of food had to be allowed; and arrested workers had to be released. Striking workers, anti-Soviet recruits, and neutral sailors—such a combination must have made the local Communists insecure, hence their resolute actions once clashes broke out on 10 March.

As the Astrakhan Communists explained: "On 10 March 1919, at ten in the morning, workers at the Vulkan, Etna, Kavkaz, and Merkurii plants stopped work upon hearing the emergency siren [*trevozhnyi gudok*] and began a rally. The workers rejected the demand of the representatives of the authorities to disperse and continued the rally instead. Then we fulfilled our duty and applied force of arms."¹³⁸ Thus the workers at several plants, not White Guardists, gave a signal to start an "insurrection," according to the Astrakhan Communists' report. What is questionable in their version of events so far is the reference to insurrection. By their own admission, the workers were beginning some rallies and speeches. That can hardly qualify as an insurrection. Most likely the Astrakhan Communists accused the workers of insurrection in order to justify their immediate use of armed force.

When the workers refused to disperse, loyal Communist troops tried to break up the rallies by force. They locked the gates of some workshops to prevent protesters from joining mutinous soldiers outside. The workers tried to break out, and at this point loyal troops applied the force of arms. As the Astrakhan Communists put it: "Since the crowds went on a rampage, the troops opened fire on the crowds." The report went on: "At this time, the crowd consisted of the deserters from the Forty-fifth Regiment, who had been recently drafted from among the street scum and other suspect persons. This crowd attacked the sentries of the Forty-fifth Regiment at the Elling [part of town], seized weapons, and moved toward the Tartar market shouting: 'Down with the Communists! Beat the commissars!'"¹³⁹ Then the crowd attacked the district Communist party committee, and the Communists had to flee, in "view of their small

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ The SR paper in Moscow reprinted this explicit document from the newspaper *Kommunist* (16 March 1919) published in Astrakhan. It is noteworthy that the Moscow Communists not only did not reprint it but did not even mention its existence. "Vosstanie v Astrakhani," *Delo naroda*, no. 10 (30 March 1919), a reprint from *Kommunist* (16 March 1919).

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

number." The rebels, continued the report, went to the church square and installed machine guns in the bell tower. Loyal troops "were compelled to open machine gun and artillery fire" on the rebels.

Even though this report is much more explicit than the official Soviet history, it fails to mention the number of casualties as a result of machine gun and artillery fire, and it describes the crowds as consisting of deserters rather than workers. Either the loyal troops managed to prevent the workers from joining the crowds in the initial stage, when they locked the gates of the workshops, or the workers did join the rebellious soldiers but the Communists did not want to refer to workers as targets of machine gun and artillery fire. The latter is confirmed in an eyewitness account.¹⁴⁰ According to this version, violence started when workers got into a fight with pro-Bolshevik sailors. Workers were shouting: "Beat the sailors! Beat the Communists!" What neither the Astrakhan Communists' report nor the SR party report mention, but this eyewitness account does, is that "the workers began to seize individual Communists and to kill them." This is probably what the Astrakhan Communists referred to by the words: "the crowds went on a rampage." It was too embarrassing to admit that in a country of the victorious proletariat, workers were seizing and killing Communists. The SR party account omitted this piece of evidence probably because it suggested that the workers were the first to start the killings. Like other sources, this one confirms that soldiers and workers attacked the party committee and installed machine guns in some locations. Heavy fighting continued for two days. Troops loyal to the Communists fired machine guns and artillery right into the crowds. Scores of rebels were seized on the streets. The crucial role in the suppression of this rebellion was played by Sergey Kirov, the chairman of the Provisional Military Revolutionary Committee. On 10 March he issued the following directive: "I order the merciless extermination of the White Guard swine by every means of defense at our disposal."¹⁴¹ On the next day Kirov elaborated on the measures to be undertaken: "All bandits, mauraunders, and others who oppose the orders of the Soviet regime are to be summarily shot . . . prevent the factory committees from making any money payments to workers, pending specific instruction on this matter." Factories not working on military contracts were to be closed; all trains out of Astrakhan were to be stopped; ration cards were to be confiscated from those who refused to work; food was to be distributed only to supporters of the Soviet regime; those who wished to eat were to present themselves at their factory, give their name to the factory commissar or factory committee, and begin work immediately. Finally, the special department was to bring all those found responsible before a Military Revolutionary Field Tribunal.¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ This is a handwritten document titled "Astrakhan'," PSR Archive, folder 2046.

¹⁴¹ John Biggart, "The Astrakhan' Rebellion: An Episode in the Career of Sergey Mironovich Kirov," *SEER*, vol. 54, no. 2 (April 1976), 231-46, here 240.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 241.

The authorities seized so many prisoners that they could not house them all in one location. Many were placed on barges on the river. On 12 March executions started. Horrifying scenes are depicted in several documents.¹⁴³ Most executions were carried out at the Cheka headquarters. At some barges the authorities were simply drowning prisoners by throwing them overboard with a stone tied to their body. On 15 March the authorities decided to add a class struggle aspect to the uprising. Prior to that date they had been executing workers and soldiers. On 15 March they began to seize merchants, house owners, and others, commonly referred to as “bourgeoisie.” Either it was a convenient moment to settle accounts, or local Communists felt that they had to present the disturbances to Moscow as the work of the bourgeoisie. In any case property owners paid a heavy price. Some women of “bourgeois” origin were raped and murdered. Houses of the “bourgeoisie” were pillaged. Those taken away were not charged with anything, simply executed. The entire operation was very much along the lines of the “class vengeance” most widely practiced during the official Red Terror in the fall of 1918.

During the insurrection forty-seven Communists were killed, and several hundred rebels were executed. How many were killed in street clashes and in the vengeance campaign afterward is not known. The conservative estimate was two thousand, but other sources quoted a figure of four thousand casualties.¹⁴⁴ The Communists did not blame the socialists for the riots but rather White Guardists or “backward masses.” The SRs explained that practically no SR organization was left in the city by that date, since during the Red Terror the entire fifteen-member local SR committee was executed.¹⁴⁵ The Mensheviks, too, were bypassed by events. The workers were much more radically anti-Bolshevik than the Mensheviks. A clearly seen pattern in Astrakhan, which was repeated over and over in various parts of the country in 1919 and 1920, was that the mass movement went out of control of any political party.

Data on one strike in one city may be dismissed as incidental. When, however, evidence is available from various sources on strikes in different cities that took place simultaneously and independently of one another, an overall picture begins to emerge. Workers’ unrest in European Russia proper—that is, in the area the Bolsheviks claimed to control—broke out at approximately the same time: February seems to have been a time of brewing discontent, March–April the peak of strikes everywhere, May a slackening, and June and July a new wave of strikes. The peaks of strike activity coincided with the peaks of the Whites’ offensives.

Workers’ unrest erupted in Russia’s biggest and most important industrial

¹⁴³ P. Silin, “Astrakhanskies rasstrely,” in *Cheka* (1922), 248–55; Melgunov, *Krasnyi terror v Rossii*, pp. 50–51.

¹⁴⁴ V. Miakotin, “Zhutkaia kniga,” *Na chuzhoi storone*, no. 7 (1924), 266.

¹⁴⁵ Chernov, “Krovavoe delo” (newspaper clipping), Nicolaevsky Collection, no. 7, pSR, Folder 64.

centers: Moscow, Petrograd, Tula, Bryansk, and Sormovo. Strikes affected the largest, primarily metal industry, enterprises: metallurgical, locomotive, and armaments plants. The myth that metalworkers were the backbone of Bolshevik support during the civil war has to be finally cast aside. If anything metalworkers were the main force in anti-Bolshevik strikes. Railway workers and printers also were particularly active in anti-Bolshevik protests. In some cities—Petrograd, Tver, and Nizhni Novgorod—textile and other categories of workers were active protesters as well. In at least five cities: Petrograd, Tver, Tula, Bryansk, and Astrakhan—the strikes acquired the character of general strikes.

Workers' demands reflected their grievances. Even though there is a profound homogeneity among them, local differences should not be overlooked. All workers demanded higher food rations and a fair distribution of food. Yet the Putilov workers were more specific: they wanted rations without privileges for the Communists, rations equal to those of Red Army soldiers, and this equality not at the expense of the rest of the population. Everywhere the demand for independent and unlimited food purchases figured prominently, and the Tula workers wanted to keep their own land plots in the countryside. The demand to release political prisoners, strike leaders, and socialists was at the top of the list everywhere as well. In most cities these arrests triggered the strikes: in Moscow, Petrograd, Tula, and Sormovo.

We encounter the most diversity in workers' explicitly political demands or their expressions of political opinion. On the one hand *all* workers' resolutions demanded free and fair elections to the soviets, and in fact all socialist opposition parties agreed on that. On the other hand some workers demanded that a Constituent Assembly based on universal suffrage be reconvened (rail workers in Moscow, metalworkers in Petrograd and Sormovo). Some workers went even further and condemned Bolshevik rule as such without proposing any concrete alternative program, as evidenced by catcalls from the floor at workers' rallies: "Down with the Soviets! Down with the commissars! It was better under the tsar!"

In at least four cities—Moscow, Tver, Sormovo, and Astrakhan—workers' demands reflected their unwillingness to fight for the Red cause at the front lines of the civil war against the Whites. They protested against being drafted into the Red Army. This attitude was even more widespread among the peasants, who defected en masse once drafted into the Red Army. It is not surprising that soldiers and sailors shared political attitudes with workers and peasants, since they had been drafted from those social groups. While it is generally acknowledged that the Kronstadt sailors joined hands with the Petrograd workers on strike in February 1921, other instances of workers' and soldiers' joint political actions against the Bolsheviks have remained largely unknown. During the strikes in May 1918 in Petrograd some soldiers and sailors joined hands with the workers, and Red Army mutinies and rebellions against the Bolsheviks took place in Saratov, the Urals, and Kronstadt in 1918, to mention

only a few.¹⁴⁶ During the spring of 1919 sailors refused to suppress a workers' strike in Petrograd, soldiers assured workers they would not act against them in Tver, sailors gave a similar promise in Astrakhan, and in Bryansk soldiers went over to the side of the strikers. Red Army draftee rebellions broke out parallel to the workers' strike in Astrakhan, and there was a mutiny in Orel. All this suggests that the Red Army was much less reliable than has been assumed. In fact deserters from the Red Army, the peasant Greens, posed a serious military threat to Bolshevik rule in several provinces for considerable periods of time.

All strikes, according to Bolshevik sources, were led by the socialists: the Mensheviks, the SRs, and the Left SRs. In Tver, however, the socialist parties were said to have lost the leadership because they were not anti-Bolshevik enough. In Bryansk, Tula, Sormovo, Tver, and Astrakhan the socialists themselves claimed to have opposed the strikes. What, then, was the role of the socialists? There is no simple answer to this question because the three opposition parties pursued different policies and there were factions within each of the parties. Individual workers who were members of those parties acted on their own convictions and did not ask for guidelines from their CC.

In the most general terms, however, it appears that the Left SRs were the most radical and "revolutionary" party, opposed to the Bolsheviks for what they believed was a betrayal of workers' self-rule, one of the main principles of "the October revolution." The SRs at this juncture were in the midst of an intense debate within the party over whether the Bolsheviks or the Whites were the worse enemy. They seem to have favored the strikes as a legitimate workers' weapon in their struggle for their rights, but they were preoccupied much more with the idea of a peasant movement directed against both enemies—the Whites and the Reds. The spread of the Green movement demonstrated that their ideas were not illusory.

Of all the opposition parties the Social Democrats were the most cautious. In several cities they called on the workers to stop the strikes and go back to work. This policy can be explained partly by their desire to preserve the legal status of the party, partly by their belief that strikes would hinder the war effort against the Whites, and partly by their own experience that strikes seldom led to the satisfaction of workers' demands. An almost automatic arrest of socialists after every strike naturally made them wary about the usefulness of strikes. As a result events overtook them in several cities. A remarkable new element in the spring of 1919 was that totally unknown common workers, members of the SD, SR, or Left SR party, came forth as leaders of the strikes. These were local leaders who had the courage to articulate workers' grievances, despite the risk to their jobs and even their lives. Unfortunately, only a few of their names are known. They considered themselves members of one of the three opposition parties, yet they acted on their own without asking guidance from above. The rank and file

¹⁴⁶ Brovkin, *The Mensheviks after October*, pp. 183 and 260–61.

themselves became leaders of the protest movement, and the official party leaders' role was considerably diminished. One can argue that this was the birth of a true workers' movement in Russia, free from the intellectuals' guidance, a movement Russian intellectuals had dreamed of at the turn of the century. It was an irony of history that this workers' movement arose in protest against a party that claimed to be the proletarian vanguard.

Reports of local organizations, articles in *Pravda*, and communications of top Bolshevik leaders all attest that the Bolsheviks knew very well that workers were expressing anything but support for the Communist party. In order to cover up real social and political attitudes, the Bolsheviks invented new labeling. A strike was seldom referred to as a strike. It acquired now a coded label: a Menshevik provocation, counterrevolutionary sabotage, or White Guardist conspiracy. The Bolsheviks employed a variety of measures in dealing with the strikes. Yet certain measures stand out as a repetitive pattern. In all cases known the initial Bolshevik response to strikes was to *ban public meetings and rallies* (Moscow, Petrograd, Tver, Tula, Bryansk, Sormovo, and Astrakhan). In several cities (Petrograd, Sormovo, Tula, and Astrakhan) the authorities *confiscated strikers' food ration cards* in order to suppress the strike. In at least five cities out of the eight considered the Bolsheviks *occupied the striking plant* and dismissed the strikers en masse: Moscow, Petrograd, Tula, Bryansk, and Astrakhan. In two cities the Bolsheviks *took hostages* from among the socialists during the disturbances: Orel and Bryansk. In all cases known the Bolsheviks resorted to *arrests of strikers*: in Petrograd 225, in Moscow perhaps 12, in Tula 1,000, in Tver an unknown number, in Bryansk 152, in Nizhni Novgorod (including Sormovo) 115, in Astrakhan several hundred (at least). And finally, in four cities the Bolsheviks resorted to *executions of striking workers*: in Moscow, Petrograd, Bryansk, and Astrakhan. Data on the overall number of workers and others killed or executed on the internal front during the period considered are rather sketchy. The numbers certainly do not include those killed in battles between the Greens and the Bolshevik forces or those killed in street fighting. Yet a few examples are available. In Petrograd and Astrakhan the estimates of those killed or executed reached several thousand. In Orel and Bryansk the suppression of rebellions must have demanded at least as many casualties. According to Martyn Latsis, during an anti-Bolshevik rebellion in Smolensk in March 1919 one hundred people were killed.¹⁴⁷ The American consul wrote to the State Department: "Reports from Moscow estimate the number of executions by the order of the Extraordinary Commission as 7000 for the first quarter of 1919."¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁷ Martyn Latsis, "K zagovoru Levykh Eserov," *Izvestiia* (21 March 1919), 1.

¹⁴⁸ Imbrie, Vyborg, Finland (11 February 1920), Records, dispatch 861.00.6346. It is noteworthy that the State Department reacted to this information by responding: "What is the source of information regarding executions first quarter 1919?" (dispatch 861.00.6346), to which Imbrie replied: "Our agent Smolny [i.e. in Smolny] reported regarding Moscow executions. His statement

It is not surprising that the Bolsheviks tried to stop the strikes at this time of great danger, especially since the White armies were launching successful offensives. What is remarkable, though, is that the Bolsheviks treated the workers as simply another enemy in the civil war—an enemy on the internal front. Attempts to fulfill workers' demands were few. The suppression of strikes was conducted as a military operation of the civil war, only it was on the internal front. It required the occupation of plants, arrests, executions, and systematic purges. The Bolshevik response to workers' protests reveals the triumph of a new mentality. The Communist party now perceived its task as fighting on all fronts. Everywhere there were armies, commanders, offensives, traitors, and deserters who had to be crushed. The rise of this militaristic approach to politics, and the replacement of bargaining and compromise with surveillance not only of workers' actions but also of their political views—all this represents the ominous ingredients of a system which was later called Stalinism.

The record of workers' strikes explains why the Bolsheviks felt compelled to abandon the New Course. As soon as they tried to curtail the Red Terror and relaxed their control over political activity, a workers' protest movement ignited with new vigor. Bolshevik rule had to remain a dictatorship or disappear. In the central Russian provinces around Moscow the Communists crushed the movement of the "backward masses" before the White armies could exploit the favorable situation. In the Urals and in Ukraine they were less fortunate, and widespread rebellions of peasants, deserters, and in some places workers made it possible for the Whites to pour into those areas, which *had already been* up in arms against the Bolsheviks.

being based on report of Moscow Executive Committee" (16 February 1920), Records, dispatch 861.00.6362.

The White Tide

PERHAPS ONE OF THE most important characteristics of the frontline war between the Reds and the Whites in 1919 was its extraordinary dynamism. The political and military situation changed quickly and dramatically. Within a year, from December 1918 to December 1919, the Bolsheviks overran Ukraine, lost it, and overran it again. They conquered the Urals, lost them, and overran them again. The speed of offensives and retreats belied the expectations of all participants. In early 1919 General Denikin would have been surprised to know that by October he was going to be within two hundred miles of Moscow. As late as May 1919 he still considered Admiral Kolchak as his superior and accepted his authority. Yet within one month Kolchak's forces were on the run while Denikin's were continuing their offensive toward Moscow. Similarly in late 1918 the Bolsheviks believed that the civil war would soon be over, since the Red Army had recaptured the Urals in the east and Ukraine in the south. Yet in May 1919 they seriously considered abandoning Petrograd, and in October Moscow itself was threatened.¹ In the spring of 1919 Lenin thought that it would take at least two years to defeat Kolchak. However, by July the Siberian Whites were in an irreversible retreat.

These dramatic fluctuations cannot be attributed to mere military luck or to any numerical superiority of troops. The irony of the situation was that the Whites, under both Kolchak and Denikin, won their most spectacular victories when their armies were vastly outnumbered by the Reds, and they were defeated at the times when their armies were at full strength, lacking neither food nor first-class military supplies and weaponry provided by the Allies. Similarly the Reds' successful advance into Ukraine in the spring of 1919 was carried out by poorly organized peasant detachments, inferior in skills and weaponry to the Whites, and conversely the Reds' defeats in Ukraine in the summer of 1919 unfolded despite the ever growing strength of the regular Red Army.

If the war had developed in accordance with the logic of army strength, Denikin would not have had a chance to advance into central Russia with a 60,000-strong Volunteer Army, as he did in May 1919.² Similarly, Kolchak could not possibly have defeated the superior Red Army and taken 20,000

¹ Liberman, *Building Lenin's Russia*, p. 36. Liberman, a functionary in Lenin's government at that time, claims that lists of those to be evacuated from Moscow were made.

² General Staff A.E.F., *The Military Situation in Greater Russia*, *Bulletin of Information*, no. 1 (5 February 1919), 15.

prisoners in January 1919 with a force in the field of only 80,000 soldiers. Yet he did. Half a year later the opposite occurred. Despite the fact that Kolchak's army was almost 300,000 strong, it was defeated by a smaller Red force.³ Military and strategic factors are far less important than popular attitudes in a civil war. If an army is welcomed by the local population, its resources and strength are automatically increased. If, on the other hand, it is unwelcome, its strength is tied up in pacifying and policing the conquered territory.

Another explanation often cited for the Whites' success is the aid provided by the Allies. Indeed, this aid was substantial. Denikin's army received tanks and airplanes, field hospitals, and tons of ammunition and military hardware.⁴ The irony of history, however, is that, as a recent study shows, Denikin won most of his victories before Allied help arrived. He made it on his own.⁵ And it was despite tremendous Allied help that the White offensive collapsed in the fall of 1919. It is impossible to explain the vicissitudes of the frontline civil war by focusing on external and military aspects alone. The offensives and retreats, victories and defeats of the parties on the front lines were intrinsically connected with the internal stability or weakness of the warring regimes.

Armed struggle in both the campaign on the eastern front between the Reds and Kolchak and the campaign on the southern front between the Reds and Denikin went through the same basic cycle: the first stage was an offensive of the Reds in the winter of 1918–19, followed by a counteroffensive of the Whites in spring and/or summer and ending with a new offensive of the Reds and the Whites' subsequent defeat by the end of the year. The significant difference between the campaigns in the east and in the south was that although they went through the same cycle, they were out of phase with each other. In the east the Red offensive phase was relatively short. The Reds were able to overrun parts of the Urals, culminating in the capture of Ufa on 30 December 1918. Exactly at that time Kolchak's troops went on a counteroffensive and captured Perm. This White offensive lasted throughout the spring and came to a halt in May. From May to December Kolchak's troops were in permanent and irreversible retreat across Siberia.

In the south and west the Red offensive stage was much longer, from December 1918 to April 1919. The Reds captured the Baltic states, all of Ukraine, and the Don Host area. Denikin's forces were locked in Kuban and the North Caucasus, their base for over a year. His cause seemed to be hopeless in April. And yet Denikin began his historic offensive in May 1919. At that time Kolchak's troops had already been halted. Denikin's offensive developed throughout the summer and reached its apogee in October at the time when the Red

³ N.G.O. Pereira, "White Power during the Civil War in Siberia (1918–1920): Dilemmas of Kolchak's "War Anti-Communism," *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, vol. 29, no. 1 (March 1987), 56.

⁴ For specific figures on British aid, see Ullman, *Anglo-Soviet Relations, 1917–1921*, vol. 2, *Britain and the Russian Civil War*, pp. 365–68.

⁵ Mawdsley, *The Russian Civil War*, p. 167.

Army was deep in Siberia pursuing the defeated Kolchak forces. The White generals could not coordinate their efforts, because their victories and defeats were, to a large extent, the result of social processes beyond their control. In unraveling the causes of the vicissitudes in the frontline civil war of that tumultuous year, it is essential to answer the question, What made the Whites' offensives possible?

The White Tide in the East

In December 1918 the military and political situation of the Whites in the Urals did not portend any hope of an offensive against the Reds. Admiral Kolchak had been in power only a few weeks after overthrowing the Directory, a multiparty civilian government. The SRs had vowed to fight his regime from within. The Red Army was continuing to advance and was capturing city after city. In February 1919 Western military observers who were quite sympathetic to the Whites did not believe that Kolchak would be able to mount a successful offensive.⁶ He could count on his side a 40,000-strong Siberian army whose worthiness against the Reds was yet to be proved and a 20,000-strong collection of former People's Army detachments whose loyalty was to the Constituent Assembly and the SRs. Their worthiness and loyalty to Kolchak were suspect. In addition there were 30,000 Czechoslovak troops. Thus the total of anti-Bolshevik troops nominally under Kolchak's command in early 1919 was approximately 90,000.⁷ The Czech troops, however, used to be allied to the SRs and the Constituent Assembly's People's Army, but now under Allied pressure they had to cooperate with the "Russian government" of Kolchak. Like the People's Army detachments, their loyalty to the Whites was questionable. In fact some Czech units resisted the Whites' executions of SRs and even considered rendering armed resistance to the White putschists in November. Clearly this military and political situation reflected disarray rather than a readiness to contain, let alone roll back, the Reds' advance.

The Allied assessment was prudent, but it proved to be wrong primarily because it lacked information on the situation behind the Bolshevik lines. The unfolding events of the next four months belied anybody's expectations: Kolchak's troops went on a counteroffensive, and by April they had advanced to a point one hundred miles from the Volga. They were close to wiping out all the gains made by the Bolshevik offensive since the summer of 1918. The Bolsheviks were in a panic as they prepared for the defense of Kazan, Nizhni Novgorod, and the approaches to Moscow.

⁶ General Staff A.E.F., *The Military Situation in Greater Russia*, *Bulletin of Information*, no. 1 (5 February 1919), 3–4.

⁷ Western intelligence estimated Kolchak's forces at 96,000 in January 1919, *ibid*, 16. Soviet official history's figure is lower, approximately 80,000. *Istoriia Grazhdanskoi voiny*, vol. 3., p. 354.

There were three main factors which made Kolchak's advance possible. The first was an unexpected discovery that the suspect units of the People's Army, particularly the detachment of Izhevsk workers, were actually the best fighters against the Reds.⁸ Izhevsk workers had overthrown Communist rule in August 1918 and supported the Constituent Assembly government in Samara. When the Reds took their city in November most of them retreated, fearing for their lives if they fell into the Communists' hands. When Kolchak overthrew the Constituent Assembly government they had to make a difficult choice: follow the appeal of the SR Central Committee and cease armed struggle against the Reds, or ignore this appeal and recognize the authority of Admiral Kolchak as the new ruler of the non-Bolshevik territory. An absolute majority of the Izhevsk workers' detachment decided to fight on. Their decision should not be interpreted as an expression of support for the admiral. Rather it showed their desire simply to keep fighting the Communists and retake their native Izhevsk and Votkinsk in Vyatka Province. In this they were successful, and in March their detachment, now a part of the White army, entered Izhevsk. They made a count of all the victims of Red Terror from the time they had abandoned the cities in November 1918 to March 1919: the total of those killed or executed was seven thousand.⁹

The second factor that made Kolchak's advance possible was the neutrality of the Czechs. Like the Izhevsk workers who adapted to the situation and pursued their own goals, the Czech Legion did not rebel against Kolchak, because the fate of Czechoslovakia was being decided by the Allied powers in Versailles. The Czechs could not afford to pursue a policy contrary to that of the Allies in Siberia. They were content to guard the trans-Siberian railroad, which was their lifeline to the port of Vladivostok and to Europe. The third and most important factor that propelled the Whites' advance, once it had started, was the weakness of the Bolshevik regime. The Whites were moving into areas which had been under Bolshevik rule for up to two, three, four, or five months, depending on the specific province. The Volga basin provinces and the Urals were the first large areas the Bolsheviks overran in the frontline civil war. Their policy had been to bring these provinces under total control of the Communist party. These policies, as we shall see, generated widespread resistance.

Red Terror in the Urals

Bolshevik policy toward workers in the Urals was even tougher than in Moscow or Petrograd. Partly this was due to Bolshevik bitterness over the Izhevsk and Votkinsk workers' armed resistance. The Bolsheviks suspected workers at other

⁸ "Dva generala," *Golos minuvshago na chuzhoi storone*, no. 1/14, (1926), 189–201.

⁹ Bernshtam, ed., *Ural i Prikam'e, noiabr' 1917 'ianvar' 1919*, p. 471.

plants in the Urals to be sympathetic to the struggle of the Izhevsk and Votkinsk plants against the commissars. This is why the Communist authorities strived to establish an iron discipline at the plants in the Urals. Mensheviks and SRs were persecuted. Any workers' disagreement with the authorities, let alone criticism or demand, was treated as subversive counterrevolutionary activity that had to be stamped out. The Votkinsk newspaper *Red Thought* described these disciplinary measures. Workers who did not show up for work would be drafted for hard labor at the railroad for two weeks. After a third warning they would be tried by the Revolutionary Tribunal as saboteurs.¹⁰ Under this ruling any slowdown or strike qualified as "labor sabotage" and was punishable by the "laws of wartime." In plain language this meant execution.

Despite such stringent disciplinary measures, strikes in the Ural plants broke out just as they did in Moscow and Tula. A rare document has survived which portrays the workers' disposition at an important metallurgical plant in Motovilikhia in Perm Province in December 1918, on the eve of Kolchak's advance:

1. About Food Supply.

We, the hungry workers, demand an increase in our ration of bread, and not the kind that even pigs would not eat, but bread made of flour . . . as well as all other additional food products, such as meat, cereals, potatoes, and other foods. As of 6 December [1918], we demand an increase of food rations, and if they are not going to be increased, we will be compelled to stop work.

2. We demand that leather jackets and caps be immediately taken away from the commissars and be used to manufacture shoes.

3. We demand the speediest possible acquisition of felt boots and warm clothes and their distribution to citizens.

4. We demand that commissars and employees of Soviet institutions receive the same food rations as workers, and that there be no privileges for bureaucrats.

5. We demand that threats with pistols against workers at the meetings be abolished, and that arrests be abolished too, and that there be freedom of speech and assembly, so that there be a true power of soviets of peasants' and workers' deputies, and not of the Chekas.

6. We demand an abolition to the taking away of food and flour from the hungry workers, their wives and children, and an abolition to imposing fines on those peasants who sell [foodstuffs] and who deliver [food to cities] and who let [workers] stay overnight [in the countryside], and we demand freedom to bring up to one and a half pud of food.

7. We demand that the Province Department of Food Supply, if it cannot provision the population with food, pass over that authority to the Motovilikhia [plant] Department of Food Supply so that it can work independently.

8. We demand the convocation of an all-plant general meeting to take place on 5

¹⁰ "Trudovaia distsiplina," *Petrogradskaia Pravda*, no. 14 (19 January 1919).

December at noon with the participation of the Regional Department of Food Supply.

9. We demand that all appointees be removed [from their posts]. Those elected by the people must take their place.

10. We demand pay for the time we spent at the meetings if they took place in work time.

11. We demand an abolition of fines for the time workers spent in search of food.

12. We demand an abolition of commissars' taking rides on horses and also in automobiles.

13. We demand an abolition of the death penalty without trial and investigation. There must be justice.

14. We demand that the commissars be for the people and not the people for the commissars. (Electric workshop) [resolution]

All 14 paragraphs have been adopted unanimously.

Chairman: Luchnikov¹¹

This workers' resolution reiterates many familiar themes of workers' complaints in other cities. As in Tula and Moscow, workers grumbled over the privileges of commissars and the pistol waving, rudeness, and commandeering tone of the new bosses. They complained that authority was in fact in the hands of the Cheka and not of the soviets, and that peasants were not allowed to sell grain due to the Bolshevik class struggle against the bourgeoisie and capitalism. The resolution is, in effect, a microcosm of local politics in the newly occupied Bolshevik Urals.

As in Moscow and Tula, the strike at the Motovilikha plant was brutally suppressed. The British consul in Ekaterinburg reported on 3 March: "Laborers opposing the Bolsheviks were treated in the same manner as peasants. One hundred laborers were shot at the Motovilikhi plant near Perm' in December 1918 for protesting against Bolshevik conduct."¹² The Bolsheviks removed everything valuable from the area immediately adjacent to the front line, obviously as a precaution against a possible seizure of equipment and supplies by the Whites. Due to the sudden and unexpected movement of General A. N. Pepeliaev of the Siberian army, however, Perm was taken in the early days of January 1919. The entire stock of what the Communists were planning to evacuate was captured by the Whites. A detailed description of that matériel was made by Allied observers. They were astonished by the sheer quantity and diversity of goods the Bolsheviks were planning to ship out of Perm. Vice-consul Palmer reported to the U.S. Department of State: "Judging from the

¹¹ *Nasha zaria*, no. 185 (26 August 1919).

¹² Sir C. Eliot to Earl Curson (5 March 1919) from consul in Ekaterinburg (3 March 1919), *Collection of Reports on Bolshevism in Russia*, p. 54, hereinafter referred to as *Collection of Reports*. The same data appeared in V. Miakotin, "Zhutkaia kniga," *Na chuzhoi storone*, no. 7 (1924), 267–68.

goods seen at the station it would appear that the Bolsheviks had practically looted the city and packed their plunder in these 5000 cars with the intention of evacuating it. But their plan was frustrated by the rapid movement of Cossacks who took part to cut retreat in the rear."¹³

The capture of Perm in January 1919 and of other cities in the Urals later that spring allowed Western observers for the first time to examine an area which had experienced Communist control. Ufa was taken by the Whites in early March, and several American officials traveled to the extreme western areas close to the front line with the Reds, beyond Ufa, in late March and early April 1919. They were able to conduct interviews with local inhabitants about Bolshevik rule. Their reports depict lawlessness and terror. Several American officials reported that they had documentary proof that the Bolsheviks had been engaged in the systematic extermination of propertied classes "including doctors, priests, shopkeepers, peasants." The Communists were hated by the local population. Many victims of the Red Terror showed signs of mutilation and torture before death.¹⁴ Alarming reports were coming from different people in the field and different regions at the same time. An official of the American Red Cross, Dr. Teusler, telegraphed the following: "Have seen this district. Extensive proof savage cruelty, Bolshevik occupation. Over 2000 civilians, men women murdered locally in cold blood without warning or trial, many peasants and small shopkeepers. Some bodies show fearful mutilation before death. Bolsheviks evidently attempted no constructive work, although in power here seven months. Entire population against them, complaining bitterly their mob rule, cruelty and destructiveness."¹⁵

Those identified by Western observers as belonging to the educated classes, as well as merchants and property owners, were of course labeled as "bourgeoisie" by the Communists, who made no secret that the bourgeoisie as a class was going to be smashed. Another contemporary report on the Red Terror in Ufa claimed that several hundred local residents had been shot.¹⁶ What is surprising in the Western observers' reports is the plain, vivid, and cruel reality of what "class struggle" meant. For example, the Bolsheviks made no secret that the "bourgeoisie" were drafted to do hard labor for the "proletarian" state: dig trenches, wash soldiers' barracks, and so on. What we learn from the Western observers' testimony is that women from among the "bourgeoisie", that is, the educated classes, were raped systematically when they were drafted to wash the

¹³ To Secretary of State from Omsk (19 January 1919); the dispatch is signed Harris. The first sentence is "Vice Consul Palmer under instruction from me visited Perm and reported in substance," Records, dispatch 861.00.3699.

¹⁴ Department of State (7 April 1919), from Paris, received from Teusler, Red Cross official. Records, dispatch 861.00.4255a.

¹⁵ Department of State (5 April 1919), from W. H. Anderson. The first sentence is: "Doctor Teusler of Red Cross telegraphs me the following," Records, dispatch 861.00.4204.

¹⁶ "The Terror," *Bulletins of the Russian Liberation Committee*, no. 9 (April 1919), 2.

barracks. Bolshevik law did not defend them, because they were representatives of the "exploiting classes."¹⁷ The treatment of captured officers suspected of being sympathetic to the White cause was even worse, according to a British observer: "The number of innocent civilians murdered in Ural towns runs into hundreds. Officers taken prisoners by the Bolsheviks here had their shoulder straps nailed into their shoulders. . . . Some civilians have been found with their eyes pierced out, others without noses, whilst two priests were shot at Perm, Bishop Andronick having been buried alive there."¹⁸ What emerges from these reports can be summarized as follows. During a short period of rule in the Urals, the Bolshevik administration had antagonized the workers and the educated classes by its policies of iron discipline, labor conscription, requisitions, and "class struggle." No wonder the Whites were greeted as liberators.

The fact that the Whites found a sympathetic urban population still does not explain how a small army of 40,000 managed to defeat the Bolshevik force of 80,000 and take 20,000 prisoners of war.¹⁹ In this regard it is interesting to compare the analysis of Western observers with that of Stalin and Dzerzhinsky's commission, dispatched by Lenin to investigate the causes of the fall of Perm. According to an American military observer, the 20,000 captured POWs "were a poor lot of men, badly fed, most of them young and forced to fight."²⁰ In other words they were not very eager defenders of the Bolshevik cause. Stalin and Dzerzhinsky's report essentially stated the same but went much further. It described the situation as a "complete disintegration of the army" (*polnyi razval armii*) caused by a lack of reserves, a bad command structure, and the counter-revolutionary disposition of reserves that arrived by the time of the fall of Perm. Red Army units were unreliable and unwilling to fight. The report returned to this problem three times, which clearly indicates the weightiness of this cause over others. Stalin and Dzerzhinsky admitted that reserves in the Eighth and Third armies "went over to the side of the enemy with joy." The problem was worsened by the fact, wrote Stalin and Dzerzhinsky, that the new recruits which had been assembled in the neighboring Vyatka Province were not only unreliable but were actually "awaiting the Whites." Stalin and Dzerzhinsky decided to split the precious, loyal Cheka forces and leave 2,000 of them in the rear with the unreliable reserves in case of emergency and send another 400 Cheka agents to the front to infiltrate unreliable units. They also proposed

¹⁷ "Siberia Today," *The Times* (12 February 1919). This has also been reported in Mr. Alson to Mr. Balfour, Vladivostok (14 January 1919). The first sentence is: "I have received the following from the Consul in Ekaterinburg, date 13 January 1919," document 22, in *Collection of Reports*, p. 32.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ The figure of 20,000 Bolshevik POWs was reported to the State Department. Records, dispatch 861.00.3622b, dated 10 January 1919. The total strength of Soviet troops according to Soviet and White sources is very close. The Soviet source states 82,000. *Istoriia Grazhdanskoi voyny*, vol. 3, p. 354. The White source of 80,000 is in *Nasha gazeta*, no. 23 (12 September 1919).

²⁰ Records, dispatch 861.00.3622b, dated 10 January 1919.

creating army Cheka units and internal barriers such as roadblocks and checkpoints to stop retreating troops.²¹

Peasant Rebellions on the Volga

Stalin's and the Allied observers' reports make it clear why the Reds were defeated in the Urals. What needs to be explained is how it was possible for a small Siberian army to unfold its offensive toward the Volga. Stalin's report discussed the "weakness of the rear," which meant the weakness of the Bolshevik hold on the countryside. The crop in the Volga basin and the Urals had been sown under the SR administration. The task of the Bolshevik military authorities was to remove as much grain as possible. Vyatka Communists reported to the Bolshevik CC: "The causes of the dissatisfaction with the soviets and the party were the closeness of the frontline . . . uncoordinated and uncontrolled requisitions, which can even be called robbery of the population by the military units, as well as actions and mistakes of soviet and party workers, as well as the drafting of hay, bread, cattle, and people."²² The peasants of course resisted, attacked requisition detachments, withheld horses, hid grain, and tried to avoid the draft. Local Communists complained that the peasants were sympathetic to deserters.²³ For that they were labeled "kulaks" and counterrevolutionaries, and punitive detachments were dispatched to "pacify" them. The result was peasant rebellions. Local Communists reported from Vyatka Province: "kulak rebellions flared up frequently in the frontline zone."²⁴ The Russian liberal observers' report was similar: "The province of Vyatka is a hotbed of insurrection, as the peasants have been completely worn out by requisitions."²⁵ As is clear from other sources, any White advance or rumor of such an advance triggered peasant insurrections. This was due in part to the fact that the local Bolsheviks tried to collect as much food as possible to prevent it from falling into enemy hands, and in part the result of peasants' losing their fear and gaining confidence in the feasibility of overthrowing the Bolsheviks.

As on most occasions the uprising in the vicinity of Syzran' was set in motion by the arrival of requisition detachments. According to the classified report of a

²¹ I. V. Stalin and F. E. Dzerzhinsky, "Ot Chlenov pravitel'svennoi komissii po rassledovaniu prichin sdachi goroda Permi" (13 January 1919), *Perepiska Sekretariata*, vol. 6, pp. 182–83. On demoralization in the Red Army, see also "Ot Ufimskogo Gubernskogo Komiteta" (27 April 1919), *Perepiska Sekretariata*, vol. 7, p. 299.

²² "Ot Viatskogo Gubernskogo Komiteta, Doklad" (May 1919), *Perepiska Sekretariata*, vol. 7, p. 397.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 398.

²⁴ "Ot Vyatskogo Gubernskogo Komiteta, Doklad" (April 1919), *Perepiska Sekretariata*, vol. 7, p. 161.

²⁵ "The Bolshevik Rear and Army," *Bulletins of the Russian Liberation Committee*, no. 9 (April 1919), 2.

special commission to investigate the rebellions in Simbirsk and Samara provinces, "the arrival of requisition detachments caused peasants' anger." They started ringing church bells and killing off the Communists.²⁶ Peasants captured food supply commissars and the local Cheka and set up their own military headquarters. On the next day neighboring districts rose up in rebellion too. According to an exhaustive recent study: "At its zenith, during the second week in March, the uprising had spread to at least 24 out of 45 volosti of Syzran' District. . . . It was a major presence in the neighboring districts of Ardanov, Alatyr', Buinsk, Simbirsk, Samara, Buzuluyk, and Buguruslan."²⁷ Local Communists described peasant uprisings in Simbirsk and Samara provinces as a conspiracy of kulaks which would enhance the Kolchak offensive.²⁸ They stated that "deserters who had run away from the front line took a great part in the rebellion."²⁹ It was difficult to restore order, complained the report, and deserters were shot on sight. In one village every fifth apprehended deserter was executed. The special commission's report stated that in Syzran' Township the local authorities "had to arrest all Red Army soldiers whose parents had been forced to pay an extraordinary food levy."³⁰ Clearly these soldiers were unreliable. But these measures only added oil to the fire, and just a few days later local Communists reported new rebellions in the area, rebellions "marked by severe cruelty." The special commission reported 1,000 rebels killed.³¹ The strength of the rebels was estimated at 3,000 in just one *uezd* (district) of Simbirsk Province.³² In another *uezd* (Vol'sk) the Greens, made up mostly of deserters, numbered 8,947.³³ In the Syzran' area, at the height of the rebellion, the peasant army grew to 22,000 men.³⁴ Local Communists reported that peasant soviets were in fact taking part in rebellions³⁵ and that the peasants' frame of mind in the surrounding provinces was alarming.³⁶ The Samara Province

²⁶ "Doklad VTsIKu osoboi komissii po revizii povolzh'ia pod predsedatel'svom P. G. Smidovicha" (A report of the Special Commission to CEC chaired by P. G. Smidovich), Ts.G.A.O.R., Fond 130, SNK, Opis' 3, document 363(1).

²⁷ Figes, *Peasant Russia, Civil War*, p. 327.

²⁸ "Telegramma iz Syzrani o raskrytii zagovora i podavlenii vosstaniia miatezhnikov v uezde" (20 March 1919), Ts.G.A.O.R., Fond 1235, VTsIK, Opis' 94, document 490.

²⁹ "Ot Syzranskogo Revoliutsionnogo Komiteta (Simbirsk Province)" (17 March 1919), *Perepiska Sekretariata*, vol. 6, p. 399.

³⁰ "Doklad VTsIKu osoboi komissii po revizii povolzh'ia pod predsedatel'svom P.G. Smidovicha," Ts.G.A.O.R., Fond 130, SNK, Opis' 3, document 363(1).

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² "Ot Syzranskogo Revoliutsionnogo Komiteta (Simbirsk Province)" (21 March 1919), *Perepiska Sekretariata*, vol. 6, p. 419.

³³ "Doklad Vol'skogo uezdnogo ispolkoma" (15 October 1919), cited in Figes, *Peasant Russia, Civil War*, p. 317.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ "Ot Simbirskogo Gubernskogo Komiteta, Doklad" (May 1919), *Perepiska Sekretariata*, vol. 7, p. 497.

³⁶ "Ot Ruzaevskogo Uezdnogo Komiteta (Penza Province) Ezhemesiachnyi Otchet" (May 1919), *Perepiska Sekretariata*, vol. 7, p. 353.

Executive Committee admitted in a classified report to Moscow that "initially, even after the suppression of the uprising, even the middle-income peasants were waiting for the arrival of Kolchak's army."³⁷

According to V. Bobrov, a Socialist Revolutionary who traveled extensively in the Urals and the Volga area at the time of the Whites' offensive, peasants rebelled against the Bolsheviks at the approach of the Whites. He estimated the total number of peasant rebels in the Urals-Volga basin at 150,000.³⁸ His estimate was remarkably accurate, since the classified report of the special commission concluded: "The number of rebels, according to various sources, was 100,000 to 150,000."³⁹

The White forces thus broke into an area which was already in rebellion against the Bolsheviks. The Whites' very advance propelled peasant insurrection, and the insurrection aided the advance. The result was that the offensive acquired a momentum of its own. That is why the Whites could defeat a more numerous Red Army and continue to advance toward the Volga. Kolchak used this favorable situation to conduct a general army draft in the newly occupied territories. The draft was initially successful, and by April the admiral had built a 150,000-strong army.⁴⁰ Allied help was pouring in. The population was welcoming the Whites. By the end of April the White army was within a two-day march of the Volga.⁴¹

The Whites' Breakthrough in the South

The collapse of Red rule in the south followed essentially the same pattern as in the east. Largely due to the Bolsheviks' own policies, their former allies turned into foes and cleared the way for Denikin's offensive. Yet the cycle of events in the south differed from the one in the Urals, since a diverse array of political and military forces were involved in Ukraine: the Ukrainian national independence government and its small army; the volunteer peasant formations which were nominally under Bolshevik command but were in fact autonomous and uncontrollable; the Don and Kuban cossacks; and Denikin's White army. All these forces pursued their own objectives, and the civil war between them was multidimensional. From the Ukrainian point of view only the war between the

³⁷ Predsedatel' A. Sokol'sky, "Doklad Samarskogo Gubernskogo Iсполnitel'nogo Komiteta o martovskom vosstanii i o polozhenii v derevne, v Sovet Narodnykh Komissarov" (13 May 1919) (Chairman A. Sokol'skii to the Council of People's Commissars, "A report on the March uprising and on the situation in the countryside by the Samara Province Executive Committee"), Ts.G.A.O.R., Fond 130, SNK, Opis' 3, document 363(2), p. 58.

³⁸ V. Bobrov, "Po Sibiri i Uralu," *Narod*, no. 1 (17 August 1919). It is remarkable that the estimate of the recent Western researcher was the same. Figes, *Peasant Russia, Civil War*, p. 327.

³⁹ "Doklad VTsIKu osoboi komissii po revizii povolzh'ia pod predsedatel'svom P.G. Smidovicha," Ts.G.A.O.R., Fond 130, SNK, Opis' 3, document 363(1).

⁴⁰ *Bor'ba za Ural i Sibir'*, p. 12, and *Istoriia Grazhdanskoi voyny*, vol. 4, p. 50.

⁴¹ *Bor'ba za Ural i Sibir'*, p. 131.

Ukrainian forces, that is, the peasant formations and the nationalists, could be called a Ukrainian civil war. The wider war involving both the Moscow Communists and the Whites against various Ukrainians they perceived as a war of aggression by a non-Ukrainian outside force.

After the withdrawal of the German occupation troops, the puppet regime of Hetman P. P. Skoropadsky in Ukraine began to collapse. It was replaced by a Ukrainian government which tried to balance its course between left-wing socialist programs and a democratic, multiparty parliamentary structure.⁴² As in 1918, the invading Red Army from the north threatened the republic of independent Ukraine. What weakened the Ukrainian government was that not all volunteer peasant detachments were on its side. In fact two of the largest ones, led by Ataman Nikifor Grigoriev and by Nestor Makhno, for the moment accepted the authority of the Moscow Bolsheviks. These units were incorporated into the advancing Red Army.⁴³

The Don and Kuban cossacks wanted to preserve their own local government and local autonomy from the Ukrainian government, from the Moscow Bolsheviks, and later from the White officers. For the moment, in early 1919, the cossacks were leaderless and in disarray. Ataman Petr Krasnov's Don government collapsed after the departure of the Germans, and cossack lands were falling under Bolshevik occupation. The White Volunteers of General Denikin saw their goal as recreating a Russia "united and indivisible." In practical terms this imperial position implied a struggle against the Bolsheviks and the Ukrainian "separatists." In early 1919 the Whites were only one of many forces and not the strongest one by far. Only a very fortunate combination of circumstances could have enabled the Whites to come out on top. In January–March 1919 the Whites, the cossacks, the Ukrainian independence forces, and peasant bands were disunited and pursuing their own separate goals. The Reds were pouring into an area affected by political chaos and a military vacuum. Moreover, the Bolshevik forces were spread very thin. In a short time, however, the Bolsheviks managed to set just about everybody—the cossacks, the peasants, the workers, and the nationalists—against them. Their policies threatened the security, customs, and very identity of these social groups. This was the beginning of a disaster that brought Denikin's army to the gates of Moscow. The Bolsheviks themselves created a combination of circumstances favorable for Denikin's success.

Decossackization

When the Red Army began overrunning the territory of the Don cossacks in February 1919, an animated discussion broke out in the Bolshevik party over

⁴² For a discussion of Ukrainian politics in 1919, see Lincoln, *Red Victory*, pp. 302–29.

⁴³ Arshinov, *History of the Makhnovist Movement*, pp. 94–95.

policy toward the cossacks. The CP Don Bureau had long-running squabbles over authority in the occupied territory with the command of the southern front and ultimately with Trotsky. Was the Don area going to be administered by the civilian department of the southern front command or by the Don CP Bureau, which was to be expanded into an Executive Committee of Soviets? In other words the argument was over the question of whether "Soviet power" would be in the form of a military dictatorship of the army command or a dictatorship of the Communist party as everywhere else. Both sides in the debate wanted, as they put it, to prevent the mistakes of the past. They referred to a short period in 1918 when the Bolsheviks had occupied the Don area. The mistake then was that the Communist party allowed the soviets to be freely elected.⁴⁴ These soviets showed no support for the Communists, and no one wanted to enlist in the Red Army. The Don Bureau frankly admitted that in the countryside there were no Communists at all.⁴⁵ To correct these mistakes, the CP decided to abolish the soviets altogether and to create "Soviet power" without soviets. Instead, special commissars with unlimited authority were appointed in the occupied *okrugs* (a cossack district equivalent to the *uezd*). This was the beginning of the notorious decossackization campaign.

For the Communists the cossacks were class enemies. They were rich and well armed, and they opposed the soviets, the committees of the poor, and any other Communist administrative innovation in the countryside. Decossackization meant the confiscation of large cossack landholdings, and the resettlement or exile of "alien" and "bourgeois" elements.⁴⁶ The general thrust of the Bolshevik campaign was to dispossess the cossacks, redistribute their land among loyal peasant migrants, and "mercilessly clear the Don area of cossack atamans and officers."⁴⁷ As a matter of first priority the Communist commissars, with their unlimited authority, issued orders to the local population in every occupied *stanitsa* (cossack settlement) to surrender arms. Special commissions to collect arms were set up. Those who refused were shot on the spot.⁴⁸ The cossacks had borne arms for centuries. An order to surrender arms was about as insulting to them as it would be to an American cowboy in Far West. Cossacks and peasants began to hide guns and rifles in fields and wells. Their patience was running out. Yet the Bolsheviks' plan for the Don continued to unfold. They were not content with merely disarming the population and establishing strict party control. This was only the beginning. The social revolution was to follow.

⁴⁴ "Ot Kommissara po Kazach'im delam Makarova (February 1919) Organizatsiia Sovetskoi vlasti na Donu," *Perepiska Sekretariata*, vol. 6, p. 321.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ A demographer, Mikhail Bernshtam, made some important calculations in his "Storony v grazhdanskoi voine," *Vestnik Russkogo khristianskogo dvizheniia*, no. 128 (1979), 300.

⁴⁷ "Ot Kommissara po Kazach'im delam Makarova (February 1919) Organizatsiia Sovetskoi vlasti na Donu," *Perepiska Sekretariata*, vol. 6, p. 323.

⁴⁸ "Ot Rev. Voen. Soveta luzhnogo fronta," *Perepiska Sekretariata*, vol. 6, p. 482.

The Communists' goal was the total destruction of cossack landholding, and on 16 February cossack landholding was abolished.⁴⁹ The ancient cossack administrative division, the *okrug*, was abolished too, and plans were made to split up the Don area into several new administrative units. As Sergey Syrtsov, a member of the Don Bureau, reported to Lenin, the northern parts of the Don Host were to be incorporated into Tsaritsyn Province so that the proportion of the cossack population would decrease.⁵⁰ The cossack circle assemblies, a traditional form of cossack self-government, were abolished as well. Cossack lands were to be settled with peasants from central Russia, loyal to Communism, and two trains of settlers had actually arrived in the Don area.⁵¹ It is clear from Syrtsov's report that he was implementing party policy. The scheme was to confiscate land from the cossacks, divide it among the peasants and grateful settlers from Russia, and thus create a social base of support in the area. Syrtsov explained: "The general conditions are such that they force us to meet the aspirations of peasants and make them a source of support in the task of liquidating the cossackry."⁵²

These plans to colonize the Don Host with settlers from Russia cannot be dismissed as an initiative of Syrtsov or the Don Bureau. Top secret documents of the Council of People's Commissars leave no doubt that detailed plans for the colonization were worked out and signed by Lenin in a decree of 24 April 1919.⁵³ In their classified correspondence the Bolsheviks made no secret that they meant to destroy not just rich cossacks but cossacks as a distinct social group.⁵⁴ Disarming the local population and Russian colonization went hand in hand with the most important part of the policy: mass terror. It was set in motion by the notorious resolution of the CP Central Committee of 24 January:

In view of the experience of the civil war against the Cossacks, it is necessary to recognize the unique correctness of the most merciless struggle against the upper strata of the Cossacks by their extermination to a man. No compromises and no half-measures would do. Therefore it is necessary to conduct mass terror against rich Cossacks by exterminating them to the last man.⁵⁵

⁴⁹ "Ot Donskogo Buro RKP(b)" (5 March 1919), *Perepiska Sekretariata*, vol. 6, p. 370.

⁵⁰ "Dokladnaia zapiska chlena Donskogo biuro RKP(B) Syrtsova o rabote Don biuro. V sekretariat RKP(b)," Ts.P.A., Fond 17, RKP(b), Opis' 6, document 83. See also "Ot Donskogo Buro RKP(b)" (11 February 1919), *Perepiska Sekretariata*, vol. 6, p. 287.

⁵¹ T. Sedel'nikov, "Kak iskorenit' Vandeiu," *Izvestiia*, no. 173 (7 August 1919), 1.

⁵² "Dokladnaia zapiska chlena Donskogo biuro RKP(B) Syrtsova o rabote Don biuro." Ts.P.A., V sekretariat RKP(b), Fond 17, RKP(b), Opis' 6, document 83.

⁵³ The decree was called "Osoboe polozhenie o kolonizatsii byvshei Donskoi oblasti" (Special regulations on the colonization of the former Don Host area). The entire text is in *Svodka*, no. 7, "O deiatel'nosti otdela grazhdanskogo upravleniia na mestakh s 1-15 maia 1919," Ts.G.A.O.R., Fond 130, SNK, Opis' 3, document 363(2).

⁵⁴ Zimin, *U istokov Stalinizma*, p. 332.

⁵⁵ This document is reproduced in two sources: Aleksandr Kozlov, "Raskazachivanie," *Rodina*, no. 7 (1990), 44, and Starikov and Medvedev, *Philip Mironov and the Russian Civil War*, p. 111.

What is striking is the degree of openness in the Bolsheviks' reports on the mass killings they committed. There is not even a hint in Syrtsov's report that there was anything wrong with the ruthless executions. They were simply a fulfillment of the plan. In his report to Lenin he wrote:

the decossackization of the cossacks, something they were so much afraid of, has begun. The punitive detachments [*karatel'nye otriady*] have taken hostages in the areas adjacent to the rebellious districts. These hostages were handed over to the *volost'* revolutionary committees and were slaughtered."⁵⁶

The extent of the Red Terror was revealed by A. A. Frenkel', a member of the Don Bureau, to the Eighth CP Congress:

The uprisings show that until there is an iron Soviet regime in the Don area, the terrorist tactic of exterminating the greatest possible number of Cossacks will not of itself suffice, since you can't exterminate all the Cossacks.⁵⁷

Special commissars in every stanitsa set up their so-called revolutionary tribunals and launched a campaign of arrests, exiles, and executions.⁵⁸ According to an eyewitness:

Most of the time the tribunals dealt with cases on the basis of lists. Sometimes it took only a few minutes to consider a case. And the sentence was almost always the same: shooting. . . . Old Cossacks from various families were shot, officers who had voluntarily laid down their arms were shot. Even Cossack women were shot.⁵⁹

In some villages there were mass executions, and mass graves were later discovered. A member of the Don Revolutionary Committee, Valentin Trifonov, reported to Lenin that in the cellar of the Morozovskii District Revolutionary Committee they discovered "sixty-five mutilated corpses of cossacks," and in Veshensky District they executed six hundred Cossacks.⁶⁰ This was perhaps one of the bloodiest campaigns in the territories conquered by the Bolsheviks. As a result the Don cossacks rose en masse in March 1919. They armed themselves with weapons hidden in rivers, wells, and cemeteries. They also seized weapons which had been confiscated by Soviet authorities and "many warehouses with a variety of supplies for the Eighth Army and its divisions."⁶¹ They immediately formed regular military units, sent out patrols, and carried out a draft of all men from the ages of sixteen to fifty-five in the liberated area. What is perhaps

⁵⁶ "Dokladnaia zapiska chlena Donskogo biuro RKP(B) Syrtsova o rabote Don biuro," Ts.P.A., V sekretariat RKP(b), Fond 17, RKP(b), Opis' 6, document 83.

⁵⁷ Starikov and Medvedev, *Philip Mironov and the Russian Civil War*, p. 125.

⁵⁸ "Ot Rev. Voen. Soveta Iuzhnogo fronta," *Perepiska Sekretariata*, vol. 6, pp. 481-82.

⁵⁹ Starikov and Medvedev, *Philip Mironov and the Russian Civil War*, p. 115.

⁶⁰ "Predsedatel'iu Soveta Oborony Leninu," signed by "Member of the Don Rev. Com. Trifonov," Ts.G.A.O.R., Fond 130, SNK, Opis' 3, document 363, p. 79.

⁶¹ "Ot Donskogo Biuro RKP(b)" (21 April 1919), *Perepiska Sekretariata*, vol. 7, p. 268.

surprising is that revolutionary committees which had been appointed by the Bolsheviks from among the local people went over to the side of the insurgents. As Syrtsov explained: "Local Rev. Coms in villages and hamlets received orders [from the cossacks] on the insurrection and mobilization. On those orders they made a mark: 'accepted to be fulfilled.'" ⁶² Syrtsov ordered the execution of such revolutionary committees. ⁶³ Rebel cossacks tried to raise popular insurrections in adjacent areas and sent out telegrams all over the Don region and even to the neighboring Voronezh Province. They wrote: "We are not against the soviets. We are for the people to elect the soviets themselves. We are against Communists, and the communes, and the Jews. We are against requisitions, robberies, and executions." ⁶⁴ Reporting on the insurgent cossacks' attempts to attract all cossacks to their cause, Trifonov wrote to Lenin: "I consider it important to inform the Central Committee that in their own agitational appeals the insurgent cossacks were disseminating circulars and instructions which had been issued to the Communist party cells and organizations concerning the policy of terror in regard to the cossacks. They also used the telegram of Kolegaev, member of the Military Revolutionary Council of the southern front, on the merciless extermination of the cossacks." ⁶⁵

The ranks of insurgents grew, and by mid-April they represented a formidable force of 30,000, which equaled roughly one-third of the total Red Army strength in Ukraine. ⁶⁶ They were well-trained fighters with an experienced professional military command. They operated in the rear of the Red Army, which was fighting the Whites and the Kuban cossacks farther south. The only response to cossack rebellion the Bolsheviks adopted was to intensify the terror against the local population. I. E. Yakir, an Eighth Army Military Council member, ordered:

In the rear of our forces rebellions would ignite again if measures are not undertaken which root out the very thought of a rebellion. These measures are: extermination of all those who raised the rebellion, execution on the spot of all those in possession of arms, and even extermination of a certain percentage of the male population. ⁶⁷

At the end of April, Syrtsov admitted that all attempts to suppress the rebellion were unsuccessful largely due to, as he put it, "the political unreliability of

⁶² "Dokladnaia zapiska chlena Donskogo biuro RKP(B) Syrtsova o rabote Don biuro," Ts.P.A., V sekretariat RKP(b), Fond 17, RKP(b), Opis' 6, document 83.

⁶³ "Ot Donskogo Biuro RKP(b) (21 April 1919)," *Perepiska Sekretariata*, vol. 7, p. 269.

⁶⁴ "Dokladnaia zapiska chlena Donskogo biuro RKP(B) Syrtsova o rabote Don biuro," Ts.P.A., V sekretariat RKP(b), Fond 17, RKP(b), Opis' 6, document 83.

⁶⁵ "Predsedateliu Soveta Oborony Leninu," signed by "Member of the Don Rev. Com. Trifonov," Ts.G.A.O.R., Fond 130, SNK, Opis' 3, document 363, p. 79.

⁶⁶ *Istoriia Grazhdanskoi voiny*, vol. 4, p. 71.

⁶⁷ According to a contemporary Soviet historian, this document is in the Rostov-on-Don Party Archive (PARO), Fond 12, Opis' 23, document 51, p. 11, cited from Aleksandr Kozlov, "Raskazachivanie," *Rodina*, no. 7 (1990), 43.

regiments dispatched to suppress the rebellion."⁶⁸ The Red command deployed 14,000 troops against the rebel cossacks without success.⁶⁹ As on the eastern front, mobilized peasants did not want to fight in a Bolshevik civil war.

Attempts to suppress the rebellion tied up Red forces, weakened the Red front, and thus contributed to the breakthrough of the Whites. When in May the Kuban cossacks, allied with Denikin's Volunteers, began pushing the Reds out of the Don region, they found their most enthusiastic allies among the Don cossacks. On 7 June the White forces and the rebel cossacks met, and the south front of the Red Army was broken. From 60,000 the White army grew to 100,000 overnight. The cossack rebellion on the Don was one of the most important causes of the collapse of Red rule in Ukraine. Two others were an outbreak of peasant rebellions and the Communists' failure to win over the cities to their side.

Makhno, Grigoriev, Zelenyi, and Others

Much has been written about the peasant movement led by Nestor Makhno. It has been examined in its relationship to the Ukrainian struggle for independence, as a movement of anarchists, and as a social movement of peasants.⁷⁰ Of great importance here is the question, Why did Nestor Makhno, Nikifor Grigoriev, Zelenyi (real name Danil Terpilo), and other leaders of peasant volunteer formations break with the Communists in the late spring of 1919? It seems that the Ukrainian peasants and the Moscow Communists had very different objectives when they both proclaimed Soviet power in Ukraine in January 1919. The more clear it became to the peasants that the Communists' Soviet power was not their kind of Soviet power, the stronger was their disposition for insurgency. Moscow Communists saw the task of Soviet Power in Ukraine, as in Russia, as one of strengthening the "dictatorship of the proletariat," which meant, in practical terms, the political hegemony of the cities generally and of the Communist party in particular. The role assigned to the countryside both in Russia and in Ukraine was to supply recruits to the Red Army and food to the new regime to enable it to win the civil war against the Whites.

The most efficient way to produce a steady flow of food, the Communists reasoned, was large-scale agricultural enterprise. One of the Communists' economic planners, V. P. Miliutin, wrote: "A socialist society must possess factories of bread, meat, and milk sufficient to emancipate it economically from dependence on the petty producer."⁷¹ To achieve this emancipation, the

⁶⁸ "Ot Donskogo Biuro RKP(b)" (21 April 1919), *Perepiska Sekretariata*, vol. 7, p. 269.

⁶⁹ *Istoriia Grazhdanskoi voyny*, vol. 4, p. 174.

⁷⁰ Sysin and Palij, *The Anarchism of Nestor Makhno*, and Malet, *Nestor Makhno in the Russian Civil War*.

⁷¹ Miliutin, *Sotsializm i sel'skoe khoziaistvo*, cited in Kubanin, *Makhnovshchina*, p. 59.

TABLE 1

Number and Land Area of State Farms (*Sovkhozes*) in Ukraine by Province

<i>Province</i>	<i>Sovkhozes</i>	<i>Desiatin of Land</i>
Chernigov	95	32,750
Donetsk	19	9,000
Ekaterinoslav	140	297,000
Kharkov	196	110,000
Kiev	40	11,954
Nikolayev	250	350,000
Podol'e	32	108,000
Poltava	219	85,896
Volyn'	194	100,000

Communist government in Ukraine initiated two policies: first it decided to convert all landlords' lands into *sovkhozes*, or state farms, where farmers would be employed like workers. These advanced farms were supposed to stabilize the food supply regardless of the "sabotage" of "petty producers." Over a million *desiatin* (a *desiatina* is equal to 2.7 acres) of land were distributed to hundreds of state farms, as seen in table 1.⁷² The second policy was to encourage peasants to join the communes, as the collective farms were called. Machines and tools were to be provided as a priority to these communes.

The Communists' agrarian policy in Ukraine was consistent with that in Russia in 1918. It failed dismally there, and the Bolsheviks were aware of it, since they abolished committees of the poor in Russia in December 1918. Yet in early 1919 they started on the same suicidal course in Ukraine. What made these same policies more ruinous in Ukraine was that traditions of homestead farming were stronger there, and the dictatorship of the city over the countryside was perceived in Ukraine as a dictatorship of the Russians and Jews, the two dominant national groups in the cities.⁷³ Moreover, the export of foodstuffs to Russia with essentially no compensation generated a strong national feeling of being robbed by the Muscovites.⁷⁴ "Soviet power" appeared in Ukraine in the

⁷² "Otchet Narkomzema UkSSR Piatomu S'ezdu Sovetov Ukrainy," *Zbirnik spravozdan' Narodnikh Komissariativ*, p. 12, cited from Kubanin, *Makhnovshchina*, p. 132.

⁷³ According to Kubanin, 68% of the urban population in Ukraine were non-Ukrainian, and of them 59% were Russians and Jews. Kubanin, *Makhnovshchina*, p. 27.

⁷⁴ See a detailed document composed by the Ukrainian SRs on the amount of goods taken out of Ukraine by the Bolsheviks: "Pis'mo k partiinym tovarishcham" (Kamenets-Podol'sk 1920), PSR Archive, file 2022.

form of Red Army troops, commissars setting up collective farms, and the Cheka. Requisitions, collective farms, commissars, and terror instead of land and "power to the soviets" generated widespread protest, as in Russia. The igniting effect of Bolshevik policies was amplified by the very fact that they were carried out in Ukraine.

Peasant Attitudes in Ukraine

Like the cossacks, Ukrainian peasants had a strong tradition of independence from central government. They differed from the Don cossacks in that they had no hostility to the Bolsheviks, at least initially. Indeed they were attracted by the populist appearance of Bolshevism. They liked the idea of self-rule from below. They liked the idea of soviets and agreed that political power should belong to the people themselves. Unlike the Don cossacks, Makhno's followers considered the Whites their enemies, whom they associated with the old regime. That is why in early 1919 they were quite willing to support the Bolsheviks when they entered Ukraine. Lenin on his part instructed his lieutenants in Ukraine, G. L. Piatakov, V. A. Antonov-Ovseenko, and L. B. Kamenev, to be diplomatic with the volunteer peasant formations and to forge alliances with them against the Whites: "With the troops of Makhno it is necessary to be diplomatic, temporarily, until Rostov is taken. We have to send Antonov there and make him personally responsible for the troops of Makhno."⁷⁵ This policy was very productive. Makhno and Grigoriev's revolutionary peasant bands accepted their status under general Red command. In early April it was Grigoriev's bands that took Odessa and forced the French to abandon their ill-conceived intervention.⁷⁶

In reality Bolshevik command over these forces was nominal. Popular leaders among their men, Grigoriev and Makhno cherished their independence and resented Bolshevik attempts to incorporate them fully into the Red Army. In the course of the spring it became increasingly apparent that the peasant volunteers understood the notion of Soviet power very differently than the Communists. In ideal terms they understood Soviet power as freedom from a centralized state, as their own power, the power of peasants to rule themselves through local elected councils and their elected military leaders—atamans. They interpreted Soviet power in accord with their traditional notions of freedom.

Equally interesting and consistent with the peasant mentality were their views on the land question. In February 1919 at the Second Congress of

⁷⁵ V. I. Lenin, "Telegramma L. B. Kamenevu," *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 50, p. 307.

⁷⁶ For a well-documented study of the French debacle in Odessa, see Kantorovich, *Frantsuzy v Odesse*. No date is indicated—received in Harvard University library in 1923.

Peasants, Rebels, and Workers of the Guliay Pole area (Makhno's home base) a resolution on land stated: "Since land is nobody's and since only those who till it should have the right to use it, all land must be owned by the laboring peasantry of Ukraine and distributed freely and equally."⁷⁷ The peasants wanted to till it individually and not in collective farms. They wanted all the land and felt cheated that the Communist government kept the landlords' land and essentially became the new landlord in the countryside. According to N. Pliusnina, a functionary in the Bolshevik Food Supply Commissariat, "they [the peasants] reckoned that they would receive all the landlords' lands. And when they did not get them, they began to wreck state farms in all possible ways. They stole hay and crops in the fields. They destroyed houses . . . it was dangerous for Communists to appear in isolated villages."⁷⁸

A resolution adopted at the Congress of Peasants, Rebels, and Workers on 10 April 1919 illustrates well the substance of their differences with the Communists. The congress represented 72 *volosti* (sub-uezd administrative units) in the area around Guliay Pole, the center of the Makhno movement. The Bolsheviks banned the congress, and Pavel Dybenko, a Bolshevik division commander and Makhno's superior, sent a telegram: "Any kind of congresses convened by the Guliay Pole Revolutionary Headquarters, which I have dissolved, are considered truly counterrevolutionary. The organizers of such congresses will be subjected to most repressive measures including pronouncing them to be outside the law [*вне закона*]. I order [you] to take measures immediately not to allow such occurrences."⁷⁹ The Makhnovites read this telegram at the congress and responded that the Bolsheviks had no business telling them whether to convene congresses or not. The resolution went on: "The current situation in Russia and in Ukraine is characterized by the seizure of power by the political party of Communists-Bolsheviks who do not balk at anything in order to preserve and consolidate their political power by armed force acting from the center. This party is conducting a criminal policy in regard to the social revolution and in regard to the laboring masses."⁸⁰ Then the resolution listed specific grievances. The Bolsheviks were accused of having manipulated elections to the Third Congress of Soviets in Ukraine. The Makhnovites demanded that all appointed commissars be removed and the principle of electability of civilian and military commanders be restored. They demanded that grain requisitions be stopped and people's cooperatives opened (the Makhnovites did not want private trade with grain). They also demanded freedom for left-wing

⁷⁷ Protocols of this congress cited in Kubanin, *Makhnovshchina*, p. 55.

⁷⁸ N. Pliusnina, "Neskol'ko epizodov iz perioda grazhdanskoi voiny na Ukraine," *Staryi Bol'shevik*, vol. 4, no. 7 (1933), pp. 84–100, here p. 88.

⁷⁹ "Materialy i Dokumenty: K istorii Makhnovskogo dvizheniia," *Na chuzhoi storone*, no. 8 (1924), pp. 229.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 229–30.

political parties and personal inviolability for leaders of these political parties. On top of it all, point number 3 read:

We protest against the reactionary habits of Bolshevik rulers, commissars, and agents of the Cheka, who are shooting workers, peasants, and rebels, inventing all kinds of excuses, and that is confirmed by the documents we have. The Cheka which were supposed to struggle with counterrevolution and with banditry have turned in the Bolsheviks' hands into an instrument for the suppression of the will of the people. They have grown in some cases into detachments of several hundred armed men with a variety of arms. We demand that all these forces be dispatched to the front.⁸¹

The political position expressed in this resolution echoed the themes in the resolutions of the Left SRs, SRs, and Mensheviks. Soviet power under the Bolsheviks was not the power of elected soviets but the power of appointed commissars and the Cheka. As a result of this open act of defiance, the friction between the Bolsheviks and Makhno's peasants intensified.

The geographical base of the Makhno movement was centered on the steppes of the southeastern Ukraine, northeast of the Crimean peninsula and southwest of the Don cossacks' lands. Peasants in other parts of Ukraine shared the same views, as evidenced by the ever more alarming tone of telegrams from local Communists to the government and the military command.

Poltava: Peasants' disposition is antisoviet although there are no open rebellions as yet.⁸²

Kharkov: In some volosti of the province there were peasant rebellions in connection with the mobilization.⁸³

Aleksandrovskii Uezd, Ekaterinoslav: The political situation in the uezd is hard. The influence of anarchists and Left SRs is very strong, which prevents implementation of the mobilization. Propagandized peasants refuse to deliver grain and food to the cities.⁸⁴

Makhno's and Grigoriev's followers were generally suspicious of the Whites. Yet this does not mean that peasants in other provinces had the same disposition. Writing to the SR Central Committee, which was much concerned with peasant political attitudes, a Socialist Revolutionary wrote: "In the entire space between Gomel and Chernigov, the peasants' political disposition is unques-

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 230.

⁸² In the open atmosphere of the 1920s, Kubanin published very revealing documents from the Information Department of the Central Bureau of Communications of the War Commissariat of Ukraine from the Red Army Archives on internal conditions in Ukraine. The document cited here is *Biulleten'*, no. 27 (30 April 1919), Tsentral'noe biuro sviazi pri Narkomvoene Ukrainy, Arkhiv Krasnoi Armii, cited from Kubanin, *Makhnovshchina*, p. 48.

⁸³ *Svodka*, no. 1 (Tsentral'noe biuro sviazi. Informotdel Narvoenkomata, 3 March to 17 April 1919), Arkhiv Krasnoi Armii, cited from Kubanin, *Makhnovshchina*, p. 48.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

tionably anti-Bolshevik. They are waiting for the arrival of Denikin eagerly."⁸⁵ Summarizing the trajectory of peasant attitudes, a Bolshevik observer concluded in *Izvestiia*: "Before each of our retreats, one can observe a profound cooling off of the sympathies of local populations toward Soviet power in grain-rich provinces, due to the activity of our food supply agencies."⁸⁶

Indeed, after only two months of Bolshevik rule, Ukrainian peasants had had enough.⁸⁷ The first serious rebellion broke out at the end of March. A band of two thousand peasants, armed with two field guns and eight machine guns, attacked Aleksandrovsk in Ekaterinoslav Province. The Communists sent out a cavalry detachment of three hundred against the rebels, but the detachment joined them. Red Commander Skachko reported to headquarters: "The attitude of Makhno himself to this uprising is not clear. There is a danger that it may embrace the entire region where Makhno's troops are situated. . . . It is necessary to undertake urgent measures. . . . For the suppression of the uprising it is necessary to send only Russian or international units. Local troops are not fit for this task."⁸⁸

Foreigners, also called Internationalists, had to be deployed against the rebels. But this was only the beginning. Peasant bands began to spring up like mushrooms after the rain all over Ukraine, and not only the detachments of Makhno and Grigoriev but dozens and dozens of bands in every province or, as Lenin put it, in every uезд in Ukraine.⁸⁹ Makhno's movement centered in the southeastern corner of Ukraine, and Grigoriev's rebellion embraced three provinces in central Ukraine. Zelenyi's band, 15,000 strong, operated in Kiev Province. Struk's band controlled the northern part of Kiev Province, and west of it was the band of Sokolovskii. In the area around Belaia Tserkov a band of Yurii Marurenko was active, which called itself an All-Ukrainian Rev. Com[itee]. Around Berdichev there were Petliura's independence detachments: around Uman', the band of Shogrin.⁹⁰ Most of these rebel bands stayed close to their home area. The peasants supported them with food and supplies, and the rebels defended the peasants from Communist requisitions. The rebels' most frequent targets were grain collection agencies and the Cheka. Grigoriev's bands were reported to have seized cloth from the Bolsheviks and distributed it freely to the peasants.⁹¹

⁸⁵ "Vseukrainskii komitet partii ESER, Otchet o poezdke v Chernigov," Ts.P.A., TsKa PSR, Fond 274, Opis' 1, document 19, pp. 45-49.

⁸⁶ T. Sedel'nikov, "Kak iskorenit' Vandeiuv?" *Izvestiia* (7 August 1919), 1.

⁸⁷ See Volin, *Men'sheviki na Ukrainie*, p. 89.

⁸⁸ Shtab Ukrainского fronta, Operativnyi otdel: "Banditskoe Vosstanie v Aleksandrovskom uезде," delo no. 30 701, Arkhiv Krasnoi Armii, cited in Kubanin, *Makhnovshchina*, p. 47.

⁸⁹ Lenin, "Rech ob obmane naroda lozungami svobody i ravenstva" (19 May 1919), *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 38, pp. 333-65.

⁹⁰ *Istoriia Grazhdanskoi voyny*, vol. 4, p. 176, and Kubanin, *Makhnovshchina*, p. 5.

⁹¹ "Ot Odessy do Tiflisa," *Bor'ba*, no. 146 (July, 1919), 2.

According to Christian Rakovskii, the Bolshevik ruler of Ukraine, three-fourths of the membership of the bands were poor peasants. The entire Ukrainian countryside was united against the Communists. This is clear from the Communists' own assessments at the Fifth All-Ukrainian Party Conference: "It is hard to distinguish between the kulak and the poor peasant in the Makhno movement. It is a mass peasant movement. We do not have anything in the countryside, anything we can hold on to, anybody who can be our ally in the struggle with the bandits."⁹² A Soviet scholar wrote in the liberal atmosphere of the 1920s, reflecting on the situation in 1919: "By the middle of 1919 the entire peasantry, all of it with all its components, was against Soviet power. . . . Peasants were . . . against fixed deliveries of grain, against the Cheka, and against the policy of socialist land use. . . . These attitudes were typical for all strata in the countryside."⁹³

More and more often the peasants' slogans were Down with the Communists! or Soviets without the Communists! The bands' popularity grew, and thousands of peasants flocked to join them. In April alone there were ninety-three separate armed rebellions against Soviet power in Ukraine.⁹⁴ Grigoriev's army numbered as many as 15,000 men,⁹⁵ Zelenyi's army up to 7,000, and Makhno's was at least 20,000 in the late spring of 1919.⁹⁶ Even if we limit our total to the known number of rebels, it would be about 45,000 fighters. This was a formidable military force, equal to about half of the Red Army's strength in Ukraine. The actual number of rebels in all bands was definitely much higher, and their combined impact devastating.

Red Army Soldiers' Attitudes

The line of demarcation between the peasant rebels and the regular Red Army troops was blurred in Ukraine. After all, Makhno's and Grigoriev's detachments were technically a part of the Red Army. As we learn from secret reports on the morale of the Red Army, the soldiers' disposition was very similar to that of the Makhno troopers. No wonder many of them so often joined the rebels. Here is a characterization of the political attitudes in the regiments of the Second Division of the Ukrainian Red Army: "Anti-Semitism is high in the regiment. Red Army soldiers' are set [*nastoeny*] against the Communists. Drunkenness and card playing are everyday occurrences. Red Army soldiers conduct un-

⁹² Ia. A. Iakovlev, "O bor'be s banditizmov," speech at the Fifth All-Ukrainian Party Conference in 1920, cited in Kubanin, *Makhnovshchina*, p. 61.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 63.

⁹⁴ Hunczak, ed., *The Ukraine, 1917-1921*, p. 266.

⁹⁵ *Istoriia Grazhdanskoi voiny*, vol. 4, p. 176.

⁹⁶ "Petliurovtsy i dobrovol'tsy," *Na chuzhoi storone*, no. 8 (1924), 231. On Makhno's strength, see Arshinov, *History of the Makhnovist Movement*, p. 138.

authorized searches and requisitions. Discipline is low.”⁹⁷ Such attitudes were widespread in the entire Red Army. All reports indicate that the soldiers displayed anything but a desire to fight in the civil war. Their disposition seems to have been to fend for themselves. A Socialist Revolutionary in a report to his party’s Central Committee made the following observations: “I had an occasion to witness how small groups of soldiers were running away from the front after Chernigov fell. One time I saw a group of such runaways marching and singing a song”:

I am playing a harmonica	I igraiu na baiane
And underneath is slippery	A pod baianom sklizko
Run away comrades	Udiraite tovarishchi
Cause Denikin’s near.	A to Denikin blizko. ⁹⁸

Run away, fend for yourself, who cares what comes next—these attitudes, captured in songs, seem to depict accurately the spirit of Red Army soldiers. It is certainly not surprising that desertion rates among them were very high indeed. In just one regiment composed of draftees from Kiev Province, 50 percent of the soldiers deserted en route from Kiev to their destination.⁹⁹ The local Bolshevik authorities fulfilled orders from Moscow and mobilized reluctant peasants into the army. Yet they could not supply the draftees even with the barest essentials. The report on the political situation in the Ninth Army frankly stated that “soldiers often went without boots.” They had not been paid for the second month in a row, and the food supply was appalling.¹⁰⁰ Soldiers were often hungry and blamed the commissars and the Jews for their misfortunes. The soldiers’ frustration was compounded by the fact that their superiors on the front lines had a very comfortable life. Division commanders and especially army headquarters customarily requisitioned from the local population whatever they thought they needed. As a report to the Military Revolutionary Council of the Ninth Army explained:

On 9 July 1919 at 9 P.M. a car of comrade Smirnov drove up to house no. 7 on Nagornaia Street. Smirnov, an aide to comrade Balanzin, member of the Revolutionary Military Council of the Ninth Army, stated that by 10 A.M. the following morning all the residents of the house should abandon the premises and leave behind all furniture, blankets, pillows, etc. They were allowed to take with them only their personal clothes. When I indicated to comrade Smirnov that this was an unjust

⁹⁷ *Biulleten'*, no. 26 (30 April 1919), *Tsentral'noe biuro sviazi pri Narkomvoene Ukrainy*, delo no. 10341, Arkhiv Krasnoi Armii, cited in Kubanin, *Makhnovshchina*, p. 50.

⁹⁸ “Vseukrainskii komitet partii ESER, Otchet o poezdke v Chernigov,” Ts.P.A., TsKa PSR, Fond 274, Opis' 1, document 19, pp. 45–49.

⁹⁹ “Politsvodka 9oi armii” (20 July 1919), Ts.G.A.S.A., Fond 192, Opis' 1, document 53, “Osobyi Otdel pri Revvoensovete 9oi armii.”

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 29 July 1919.

decision and that the Province Party Committee and Executive Committee would not allow it, he responded that they did not fear either of those and that they had been doing this in all the cities where they happened to pass some time.¹⁰¹

Quite aware of the methods of their commanders, the common soldiers helped themselves to local residents' property. Dozens of reports describe Red Army soldiers looting, confiscating pigs and horses, even robbing those working in the fields.¹⁰² As a result hostility to the Reds increased.

The Three Blows to the Reds

Communist authorities suffered three crushing blows from peasant rebels which ended Communist rule in Ukraine. The first was the rebellion of Grigoriev's forces in May. The second was the rebellion of Makhno's forces in June and July, and the third was the partisan warfare of Zelenyi's bands near Kiev in August. With the evacuation of Odessa by the French and the conquest of most of Ukraine by April 1919, the Communist Ukrainian government and the Red Army command were planning to continue their advance into Moldavia and even to Hungary.¹⁰³ But peasant rebel divisions incorporated into the Red Army refused to march to Moldavia. Grigoriev was the leader of this mutiny, which very quickly escalated into an armed rebellion and spread to three provinces by early May. With astonishing speed Grigoriev took Ekaterinoslav, Kherson, Nikolaev, and Kremenchug.¹⁰⁴ In a number of cities the garrison came over to the side of Grigoriev without a fight (Cherkassy, for example, and Kremenchug). As a Soviet historian put it: "In some cities, as soon as a detachment of Grigoriev's forces appeared, the garrison declared itself neutral and the city went over under the authority of Grigoriev's atamans."¹⁰⁵

Literally in a matter of days Soviet power ceased to exist in a large part of Ukraine. More and more units were going over to the side of Grigoriev. A protracted and bitter struggle started, a war on an unexpected front inside the supposedly Soviet territory. The Red Command deployed 20,000 troops against Grigoriev.¹⁰⁶ At the end of April and in early May military arithmetic was turning against the Reds. A 100,000-strong southern Red Army faced Denikin's army of 60,000, added to 30,000 Kuban and Terek cossacks. In addition 30,000 rebel Don cossacks were fighting behind the Red lines at that

¹⁰¹ "V Revvoensovet 9oi armii," (9 July 1919), Ts.G.A.S.A., Fond 192, Opis' 1, document 26.

¹⁰² Telegramma v Shtab 9oi armii ot: Predsedatelja Gubernskogo Revoliutsionnogo Komiteta (19 July 1919), Ts.G.A.S.A., Fond 192, Opis' 1, document 26.

¹⁰³ *Istoriia Grazhdanskoi voiny*, vol. 4, p. 70.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 177.

¹⁰⁵ Kubanin, *Makhnovshchina*, p. 71.

¹⁰⁶ *Istoriia Grazhdanskoi voiny*, vol. 4, p. 177.

time as well as 17,000 of Grigoriev's rebels. The effect of the rebels however, was not merely in numbers. They were tearing apart the Soviet administration from within, paralyzing communications, mobilization, and supply services. Not only did the rebels make Denikin's advance possible; they were the decisive factor in its success.

In May, Makhno did not join Grigoriev. At least publicly he deplored the anti-Jewish pogroms and decided to distance himself from Grigoriev. Barely a month later, however, Makhno's own break with the Communists became unavoidable. Since Makhno's troops continued to draft resolutions critical of the Communists and the Cheka, Vladimir Antonov-Ovseenko, the Bolshevik commander in chief, recommended that they "reorganize [Makhno's] brigade, strengthen the Communist component, neutralize the influence of the anarchists, and decisively cut off the bandit elements."¹⁰⁷ On 19 May Denikin's forces launched their offensive to the north toward Kharkov and to the west toward central Ukraine. The thirteenth Red Army, of which Makhno's brigade was a part, was badly battered.¹⁰⁸ According to the supporters of Makhno, their defeats at the front were the result of the fact that they were not supplied with ammunition. Makhnovites believed that the Bolsheviks deliberately threw them into battle without supplies in order to weaken their forces. Some of them even suggested that the Bolsheviks had decided to sacrifice the rebel territory to the Whites.¹⁰⁹ Whether or not this was the case, the fact remains that by the beginning of June the rupture between the Reds and the Makhnovites was complete. Trotsky wrote in his famous article "Makhnovshchina" that it was high time to put an end to the Makhnovites once and for all. According to most Soviet sources, Makhno's bands committed an act of treason which had a devastating effect on the front line against the Whites.¹¹⁰ Makhno's forces were reported as having disintegrated and exposed the front, which made the Whites' breakthrough possible. The Petrograd *Izvestiia* reported that a Revolutionary Tribunal chaired by G. L. Piatakov had decided to execute Makhno (if they could capture him) because the Whites had broken through the front line held by his forces. The paper continued: "the Makhno movement embraced the neighboring [Red] army, and this predetermined the defeat of the Red Army."¹¹¹ So according to this source, it was not so much Makhno's treason that caused the defeat of the Red Army but the fact that a "Makhno mood" had seized the Red Army. The rupture between Makhno and the Bolsheviks had a devastating effect on the course of the frontline civil war. Denikin's forces broke through in early June, threatening Kharkov and all of central Ukraine.

On June 2, barely ten days before Denikin marched into Kharkov, the city

¹⁰⁷ Rakitin, V. A. *Antonov-Ovseenko*, p. 235.

¹⁰⁸ *Istoriia Grazhdanskoi voyny*, vol. 4, p. 178.

¹⁰⁹ "Pravda o Makhno," *Odesskii nabat*, no. 7 (16 June 1919).

¹¹⁰ *Istoriia Grazhdanskoi voyny*, vol. 4, p. 178.

¹¹¹ "Makhnovshchina," *Izvestiia Petrogradskogo Soveta*, no. 189 (July 1919).

soviet debated the crisis. High-ranking Communist speakers—G. L. Piatakov, Andrei Bubnov, and Artem [Fedor Sergeev]—saw the causes of the collapse of the front in the shameful retreat of the “Makhno bands.” The Left SR speaker, Vasiliev, pointed out in his speech that the defeats were a result of the decomposition of the Red Army and uprisings in the rear of the front line. The workers and peasant masses had become disillusioned with Soviet power. He condemned the terror, the Chekas, and the food supply policy and demanded new elections to the Kharkov soviet. The Menshevik speaker Ber (B. N. Gurevich) seconded Vasiliev and said that in order to “dissipate anti-Soviet attitudes in the countryside” the idea of communes and committees of the poor had to be abandoned. An end had to be put to the dictatorship of the CP. A new all-socialist multiparty government had to be created. The Bolshevik answer to these recommendations is most revealing of what they perceived to be the causes of the catastrophe at the front. Kliment Voroshilov replied that the Mensheviks and SRs were trying to turn a difficult situation to their own advantage. There was no need to change Soviet policy in any way. The cause of the setbacks lay in the Left SRs’ and Mensheviks’ counterrevolutionary agitation. Another high-ranking Bolshevik, Iosif Kosior, continued: “We know the needs of workers and peasants not worse than the Mensheviks. But at the current critical moment it is untimely to present unfulfillable demands, as the Mensheviks do. By their demagogic agitation they corrupt and darken the consciousness of workers.” Zorin, speaking as a representative of the Petrograd soviet, continued in the same vein: “Yes it is necessary to change Soviet policy, but in the direction opposite to the one recommended by the Mensheviks. For the self-defense of the working class and the socialist revolution it is necessary to strengthen our extraordinary institutions—the Cheka.”¹¹² On the eve of their departure the Bolsheviks still believed there was nothing wrong with their policies.

Makhno did not in any way want to help the Whites. For him they were enemies as well, and before long Makhno would launch his famous partisan warfare, this time against Denikin’s forces. In July and August, however, Makhno’s detachments continued to attack the Chekas, grain collection agencies, and other attributes of Communist rule. Makhno’s detachments crushed the Bolsheviks in central Ukraine from within, and Denikin took full advantage of this. The White army took Kharkov in June, overran central Ukraine in July, and was well on the way to Kiev by August 1919.

Zelenyi’s guerrilla warfare against the Reds in Kiev Province predetermined the Reds’ departure from Kiev at the end of August. During the last weeks of Bolshevik rule in Ukraine in the late summer of 1919 it was hardly possible to draw a line on the map that would delineate the Red-controlled territory from that of the Whites. The territory from Odessa to Kiev was a mosaic of rebel

¹¹² *Izvestiia Khar’kovskogo Soveta*, no. 128 (3 June 1919).

detachments. Ukrainian independence units of Simon Petliura were active in the west, and scores of small partisan anti-Bolshevik detachments were everywhere to the east and north. According to N. Pliusnina, who served in the Bolshevik food supply administration in Odessa, "the kulaks" blew up the bridges in the direction of Kharkov. That made it impossible for the Bolsheviks to evacuate valuables from Odessa. No one knew for sure where the rebels were and whether a train could reach Kiev, let alone Moscow. According to Pliusnina, the last session of the Province Committee in Odessa discussed the results of the suppression of the kulak rebellion.¹¹³ As it turned out, it had not been completely suppressed, since peasant rebels cut off the Reds' retreat from Odessa and trapped many of them. As in so many instances earlier, they cleared the way for Denikin's army.

The peasant rebel movement played a crucial role in the collapse of Red rule in Ukraine. Its profound weakness, however, was that peasants did not and could not hold and administer territory cleared of the Bolsheviks. They were partisan hit-and-run bands. They simply destroyed the attributes of Bolshevik power and of state power as such. It was a rebellion of the countryside against the cities. And since the cities were the symbol of Communist, Russian, and Jewish rule, these movements were anti-Communist, anticity, anti-Russian, and anti-Jewish. As it often happens, the Jewish residents of small towns and cities—mostly craftsmen, petty traders, and workers—were to suffer. They were accused of supporting the Bolsheviks and bore the brunt of peasant anti-Communist rage. Grigoriev's bands were particularly notorious for their pogroms. In the towns of Cherkassy and Elisavetgrad there were three thousand victims in each. A Menshevik paper reported:

There was no street in Cherkassy where a member of a [Jewish] family had not been killed. . . . In a small place Smela during the first pogrom on 11 March, eleven people were killed. . . . The trains following to Cherkassy did not give mercy to those remaining and beginning with 15 May seized victims on the streets, took them away from their homes into a special railcar at the station. Then they ordered those arrested to run. Fifty-six out of sixty were cut down by machine-gun fire. Four survived by chance. . . . Blood was spilled not only in the towns and cities. Many people were killed on the road between Nikolaev Kremenchug and Razdelnaia. On these railroads Jewish passengers were thrown out of the train at full speed.¹¹⁴

Pogroms were also reported to have taken place near Nikolaev¹¹⁵ and Kiev by a variety of witnesses who were politically at odds with one another: Mensheviks, Kadets, and even Communists. The Political Directorate of the Red Army

¹¹³ N. Pliusnina, "Neskol'ko epizodov iz perioda grazhdanskoi voiny na Ukraine," *Staryi Bol'shevik*, vol. 4, no. 7 (1933), p. 90.

¹¹⁴ *Nash golos*, no. 116 (3 June 1919).

¹¹⁵ "Rezoliutsiia protesta Iugprofa protiv Evreiskikh pogromov," first published in Kolesnikov, *Professional'noe dvizhenie i kontrrevoliutsiia*, pp. 402–3.

reported to Moscow: "The wave of [anti-Jewish] pogroms has embraced almost all of Ukraine. Bandits of all kinds conduct blatant anti-Semitic agitation."¹¹⁶

The situation in many Ukrainian villages and towns in the summer of 1919 can be best described as *bezvlastie*: without any authority, or a power vacuum. The Bolsheviks were on the run and did not venture far from railroad tracks. Bands of all kinds would come and go with the speed of a kaleidoscope. Some of them had political ideals, others were indistinguishable from criminal gangs. Sometimes posing as Grigoriev's detachments, other times as Cheka units, they stopped trains and systematically robbed passengers, referring to this as a "requisition" from the bourgeoisie. Turmoil, upheaval, anarchy, and jacquerie were words used to describe the Ukrainian countryside. The White forces of General Denikin were not numerically large, but they had a tremendous advantage over peasant rebels in that they strove to administer the territory they took. A small but well-armed and organized White force overran all of Ukraine.

Red Terror in Ukraine

Few people would be surprised by the evidence that the peasants rose up against the Communists. Yet a myth persists that in the cities the Communists had a loyal constituency. Indeed, when the Communists entered Ukrainian cities in January and February 1919, the Russian part of the population was favorably disposed to them. Hetman Skoropadsky's rule was discredited as having been too closely associated with the Germans, and the Directory government of independent Ukraine was disliked by the Russian educated society, which tended to regard Ukraine as a part of Russia, an insult to Ukrainians.¹¹⁷

Communist rule in Ukraine in 1919 was somewhat different than in Russia. First, it was established by military conquest. Political discourse in the soviets remained multiparty in character but was devoid of any practical meaning. The soviets and other electable institutions were set up from the top down, and elections were held rarely or under the threat of force. Second, the Communist party was very weak even in the cities, let alone the countryside, and relied not so much on the soviets and party committees as on the Red Army and the Cheka. Third, the record of Communist policies during this period was a replay of the excesses of 1918 in Russia proper: requisitions, indemnities, hostage taking, and executions.

The duration of Bolshevik rule varied from city to city. In Kharkov it lasted from January to June and in Odessa from early April to mid-August, but the overall pattern seems to have repeated itself time after time. Upon entering a

¹¹⁶ "Ot Politupravleniia Narkomvoena Ukrainy" (29 March 1919), *Perepiska Sekretariata*, vol. 6, p. 522.

¹¹⁷ "V Kieve," *Delo naroda*, no. 4 (23 March 1919).

city the Communist authorities would disband the duma and the courts, nationalize banks, and proclaim a dictatorship of the proletariat.¹¹⁸ As in 1918 their first priority was to place workers under Communist party control. Trade union boards where the Mensheviks were strong were arbitrarily disbanded, and Communist officials replaced them. Elections to the soviets, when they did take place, were conducted in an atmosphere of pressure and under direct supervision of the Cheka. The Menshevik paper in Kharkov, for example, published a telegram of the Communist chairman of the electoral commission: "It has been suggested that the local Chekas take upon themselves the most energetic electoral agitation in the elections to the Ukrainian Congress of Soviets. . . . Instructions are to be received at the local committees of the Communist party. All resolutions at the rallies and meetings are to be telegraphed to the Information Department of the Vecheka."¹¹⁹ The Mensheviks protested this Cheka supervision of the electoral campaign and asked why the political police had to know the opinions expressed at rallies and plants.

After several weeks of Bolshevik rule, the Mensheviks and SRs were expelled from the soviets and forced underground in most Ukrainian cities.¹²⁰ (The Left SRs remained, however, and their political influence was enormous.) Here, for example, is a Communist report from Elisavetgrad on local politics:

In the Elisavetgrad soviet the Communists have a minority. The Executive Committee consists of forty people. The SRs are everywhere, even in the management. It was possible to remove them only by force. Because of this abnormality the party committee decided to conduct new elections to the soviet on 26 March. . . . Two months have passed by since the seizure of power in Elisavetgrad, but our work has not yet been set right. The most important reason for this is anti-Semitism. Among the workers of the largest of the Elisavetgrad plants and among the railroad workers agitation is going on against Soviet power as the power of the Jews. . . . It is unlikely that new elections will have positive results.¹²¹

The Communists were aware of their weakness and tried to preserve at least the neutrality of workers. Even though most factories in Kiev, Odessa, and Kharkov were idle, workers were still paid their wages. Many were recruited into the Red Guards or the Cheka and thus obtained privileged food rations. As in Russia, those who remained on the factory floor began to grumble because life was becoming ever more costly. A curious pattern, repeated in all Ukrainian cities, was that as soon as the Communists entered, food prices tended to rise.

¹¹⁸ Grinfel'd, *Iz vospominanii o bor'be za svobodu i narodovlastie v Odesse, 1918-1920*, p. 22.

¹¹⁹ "Vseukrainskii S'ezd Sovetov i Vseukrainskaia Cheka," *Nash golos*, no. 42 (25 February 1919).

¹²⁰ "Ot Odessy do Tiflisa," *Bor'ba*, no. 146 (July 1919), 2. See also "Konferentsiia Nikolaevskoi organizatsii RSDRP," *Put' Sotsial Demokrata*, no. 164 (16 March 1919).

¹²¹ *Svodka otdela osvedomleniia Sovnarkoma UkSSR* (3 April 1919), cited in Kubanin, *Makhnovshchina*, p. 48.

This surely reflected the insecurity of traders. The first thing the Bolsheviks did was to prohibit private trade. That of course severely limited the food supply and pushed food prices up even more.

Bolshevik policy in Ukraine in regard to the soviets, socialist parties, and workers was hardly different from the policy in Russia. The Bolsheviks tolerated opposition parties in some cities and drove them underground in others. They manipulated elections and disbanded independent trade unions. They shut down opposition newspapers and arrested popular socialist leaders. All that had been practiced in Russia as well. What distinguished Communist rule in Ukraine was the role assigned to the Cheka in what was then called the "class struggle." The Cheka in Ukraine was even less accountable to any authority and more prone to resort to executions than in Russia. Martyn Latsis, a high-ranking Cheka boss, discussed the defects of the Ukrainian Cheka in his letter to the local Chekas. There were too many cases when Cheka personnel used items confiscated from speculators for personal consumption. There were too many comrades habitually drunk. Cheka agents were too rude even with workers. They did not respect the religious feelings of the population. As a result, Latsis concluded, "Instead of the broad support of the population, we find almost exclusively hatred. . . . But it is inadmissible that almost the entire population is set against Soviet power."¹²² Such misdeeds listed by Latsis pale in comparison with the Cheka atrocities reported in a variety of sources: testimony by the Mensheviks, SRs, and Kadets, and eyewitness accounts of foreigners, both German and Allied, who happened to be in Ukraine. Some skeptics are likely to dismiss this evidence as biased. None of these witnesses were admirers of the Bolsheviks. Yet an attentive reading of these accounts shows that many people who could not possibly have known one another, and never met, wrote what they knew at the same time and repeated in their testimony specific details of the Cheka terror in Odessa, Kharkov, and Kiev. These details and patterns recur with such regularity that it is difficult to dismiss them as coincidental. Many of the stories involve war requisitions and indemnities.

The defeated party in a war is often forced to pay an indemnity. The bourgeoisie was a defeated class, according to the Communists. Kiev, Kharkov, and Odessa were not rich cities by the spring of 1919. Yet in comparison with Petrograd and Moscow they were rich indeed. Many of the Russian intelligentsia—lawyers, professors, and entrepreneurs—had fled to the south in 1918. Now many of them were caught by the Red advance in these cities. As soon as the Communists took Kharkov, Kiev, and Odessa they made it known that the bourgeoisie in each city were to pay an indemnity. In Odessa they were to raise 500 million rubles.¹²³ A German soldier who stayed in Odessa and a Georgian

¹²² M. Latsis, "Vsem Chrezvychainym Kommissiiam po bor'be s kontrevoliutsiei na Ukraine," in "Rabota Cheka," *Na chuzhoi storone*, no. 5 (1924), pp. 168–72, here p. 168.

¹²³ "Ot Odessy do Tiflisa," *Bor'ba*, no. 146 (July 1919), 2. See also Niemann, *Fünf Monate Obrigkeit von Unten*, p. 10.

Menshevik (who had never met) each described the indemnity campaign in identical terms. The Bolsheviks took hostages from among the bourgeoisie and threatened to execute them if their families did not raise the funds. Then the campaign to expropriate valuables from the "bourgeoisie" in favor of the "entire people" broadened. Red Guards and the Cheka began searching block after block, apartment after apartment, confiscating clothes, food, and valuables. By mid-May the Odessa Bolsheviks decided to regularize this mass expropriation and published an order:

In accordance with the decision of the workers' soviet, today on 13 May registration of property will begin according to a special questionnaire with the aim of expropriating from the propertied classes foodstuffs, shoes, clothing, money, valuables, and other items which are needed by the entire working people. . . . Everyone is obligated to render assistance to this sacred task. . . . Those who will not abide by this directive must be arrested immediately; those who render resistance must be shot.¹²⁴

Then followed a list of items subject to confiscation: men's suits and bicycles. blankets in excess of one per bed, sheets in excess of two per bed, and so on. The only problem the commissars ran into was that workers' wives raised a row when their soup bowls were expropriated, and workers staged a rally to defend their proletarian property.¹²⁵

Several sources testify that those labeled "the bourgeoisie" were evicted from their apartments and drafted to perform hard labor for the "worker and peasant government." The Odessa *Izvestiia* wrote: "If we shoot several dozen of these scoundrels and fools, if we force them to clean the streets and their wives to wash Red Army barracks (an honor for them), then they will understand that our authority is firm and they should not pin their hopes on the English."¹²⁶

Systematic searches of apartments and confiscations of furniture and clothes were also reported from Kharkov.¹²⁷ Forcing the wives of the "bourgeoisie" to wash barracks must have been a widespread practice, since there was a reference to it in Kharkov, Kiev, and even Perm Province as well. A recurring theme in many reports is that "bourgeois" women were abused by Red Army soldiers in the barracks. In plain English, the Bolshevik rulers were thieves and rapists. A typical scene at the time was that a Cheka detachment would burst into the apartment of a lawyer, doctor, businessman, or an officer with guns pointed at the owners and, after a search, would confiscate valuables, take hostages, and

¹²⁴ "Den' mirnogo vosstaniia," *Izvestiia Odesskogo Soveta rabochikh deputatov*, no. 36 (13 May 1919), 1.

¹²⁵ "Ot Odessy do Tiflisa," *Bor'ba*, no. 146 (July 1919), 2.

¹²⁶ Melgunov, "Krasnyi terror" v Rossii, 1918–1923, 2d ed., p. 49.

¹²⁷ This is an exceptionally detailed and well-documented document on industry, politics, and the civil war, titled "Khar'kov." The author is not identified. It is clear from the contents, however, that the document was written in the summer of 1919 after Kharkov was taken by Denikin's army and that the document was an attempt to survey the economic and political situation in the area. A copy was sent to the Allies. Cited here from a copy in Records, dispatch 861.00.7791.

draft women for "hard work."¹²⁸ It was common knowledge that Cheka agents kept much of the expropriated booty for themselves.¹²⁹ In Kiev the Cheka employed several hundred men. It had its own trucks, machine guns, and plenty of weapons and money. All sources indicate that executions started a couple of weeks after the Bolshevik takeover and intensified progressively as the Communists' hold on the country was threatened. According to the Georgian Menshevik, 200 people were executed as counterrevolutionaries during his one-month stay in Odessa.¹³⁰ Sergey Melgunov cites the figure of 2,200 for the three summer months.¹³¹ The German soldier's report shows the highest figure for the total number of victims in Odessa—13,000 for the entire five-month period of Bolshevik rule.¹³² This would suggest that the lion's share of executions took place during the last weeks before their departure. Indeed, the policy of Red Terror was officially proclaimed in Ukraine after the fall of Kharkov in June 1919. The first page of the Cheka newspaper bears evidence, with its poems praising terror and threatening "class enemies," to the fact that the Communists made no secret of their mass terror. The Odessa *Izvestiia* published one of many threats to the bourgeoisie: "The Red Terror has been set in motion. And it will start hitting the bourgeois neighborhoods. The bourgeoisie is going to crack under the bloody blows of Red Terror."¹³³

Cheka agents usually made arrests at night, never said anything about the charges, sent the "case" to the Cheka collegium, and simply filled in a verdict on the form, such as "an agent of Grigoriev and Denikin" or "a well-known counterrevolutionary," and then suggested that the accused sign it. If the accused refused, he was beaten and tortured. He had to sign a confession and name his accomplices.¹³⁴ Officially the mass executions before the Bolshevik departure were called a campaign to unload the prisons. On 8 June in Kharkov, two days before abandoning the city, the Bolsheviks began to "unload" the local prison. According to a survivor, they dug a huge trench and executed seventy-nine people.¹³⁵ The prisoners were made to undress before execution, and their clothes were distributed to Red Army soldiers. According to another witness, the Cheka cells were worse than the prison. Fifty people were executed there as

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

¹²⁹ That is clear from the Latsis letter, "Vsem Chrezvychainym Kommissiiam po bor'be s kontrrevoliutsiei na Ukraine," in "Rabota Cheka," *Na chuzhoi storone*, no. 5 (1924), 168–72, here 170.

¹³⁰ "Ot Odessy do Tiflisa," *Bor'ba*, no. 146 (July 1919), 2.

¹³¹ Melgunov, *Krasnyi terror v Rossii*, p. 49.

¹³² Niemann, *Fünf Monate Obrigkeit von Unten*, p. 10. According to Kenez: "The Bolsheviks had carried out more than a thousand bloody murders during the last days of their rule [in Kharkov]," *Civil War in South Russia*, vol. 2, p. 157.

¹³³ Melgunov, *Krasnyi terror v Rossii*, p. 49.

¹³⁴ "Khar'kov," Records, dispatch 861.00.7791.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.* p. 19; identical data is in "Kharkov under Red Terror," *Bulletins of the Russian Liberation Committee*, no. 35 (18 October 1919), 3.

"enemies of the people" (another familiar label). These were primarily "saboteurs," hostages from the "bourgeoisie," and "counterrevolutionaries."¹³⁶ When the Whites marched in, the graves were opened and bodies identified and photographed.¹³⁷ It was determined that most of the victims had been killed with a shot to the back of the head.¹³⁸

In Kiev, Red rule lasted longer, until 28 August, and the number of victims was greater. It is significant that an account of the Red Terror in Kiev, made by Red Cross Sisters of Mercy, reiterates many of the essential procedural details reported from Kharkov. These sisters had never been to Kharkov and could not have known what other witnesses reported, yet their testimony is similar. According to their report: "Continual executions took place. They went on every night during June, July and August. But this last week was one of wholesale slaughter."¹³⁹ As in Kharkov there was a concentration camp for counter-revolutionaries with several hundred inmates, in addition to those kept in the Cheka itself. Beginning on 8 August the terror intensified, since the Bolsheviks began to fear that they would have to abandon Kiev. A special commission was set up to review cases quickly and to pass verdicts. According to the sisters' testimony:

The examiners—two men and one woman arrived at the Concentration camp. They were quite uneducated people. The prisoners were called out in alphabetical order and presented to these individuals who had the right to liberate them, transfer them to the category of hostages, or shoot them. There existed no preliminary examination minutes, no statement of the case to guide these revolutionary examiners. They were only in possession of the prisoner's identity card. It contained name, age, class, profession of the prisoner and the category to which he had been previously assigned, sometimes a brief qualification of the crime. Then the examiners were confronted with a living man. He was subjected to a hurried examination. The commission worked from 12 to 5 and reviewed 200 people, consequently giving only one or two minutes to each. The sentences were pronounced with lightning rapidity. There was no one and nowhere to appeal to. The sentence was final.¹⁴⁰

Anyone familiar with the style of Cheka collegium work in Russia would recognize this procedure as typical. It is better known in the context of the 1930s, and yet it was used in 1919.

¹³⁶ "Khar'kov," Records, dispatch 861.00.7791, pp. 26–27.

¹³⁷ Photographs and documents were delivered to the Allies. See "Atrocités Bolchevistes," compiled by Bureau de la Presse Russe a Constantinopol. The U.S. high commissioner added the following to the documents: "The information contained herein as well as innumerable other evidence of the horrors perpetrated by the Bolshevik regime in Russia are vouched for by many impartial observers of various nationalities arriving here from time to time in Constantinopol," rear admiral, U.S. Navy—U.S. high commissioner in Turkey to Department of State, Records, dispatch 861.00.6277.

¹³⁸ "Khar'kov," Records, dispatch 861.00.7791, p. 37.

¹³⁹ *In the Shadow of Death*, p. 44.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

To the Red Cross sisters it appeared that the victims condemned to death, and those lucky ones freed, were chosen arbitrarily. They could not understand why Mr. Mankovsky, who used to own 6,000 desiatin of land before the revolution, had to be shot. He had not committed any crime. The reason that the sisters could not understand the Communists' rationale was that they applied the criteria of individual guilt, common in civilized countries. The Bolsheviks, however, rejected "bourgeois civilization" and applied their own "class criteria." It was irrelevant what Mr. Mankovsky had or had not done. By definition he was "a class enemy." It did not matter that he did not have any land now. In his consciousness he was a kulak, hence an enemy of the proletarian revolution, and hence he was condemned to be shot. The fate of another man, Mr. Birskey, was decided after only one question: "Were you the mayor of Gomel?" "Yes." He was to be executed simply because he represented the ruling establishment of the overthrown "bourgeoisie." A similar case was that of Mrs. Bobrovnikova, a landowner from Chernigov Province. The sisters described her last days: "She was informed on by her servant and imprisoned together with her infant child. When Mme. Bobrovnikova realized that death was inevitable, she flung herself on the floor weeping, tore her hair and implored mercy for her child's sake."¹⁴¹

The "class" approach was practiced many times by the Cheka and its successor organizations. As recent research has shown, the same procedure and the same questions and categories were used when the Red Army overran western Ukraine in 1939. Anybody who was a mayor, a policeman, or represented the "overthrown bourgeois" order in any capacity was either shot or exiled to Siberia.¹⁴² In Kiev in 1919 some victims were executed not on the basis of class origin but simply as a result of administrative fiat or personal arbitrary actions of Bolshevik rulers. "One was a Soviet employee, Mariia Gromova, a young and intelligent woman. She was a Socialist, but probably not a Bolshevik. Her honesty rebelled against the cupidity and corruption of the commissars. Apparently she had attempted to bring charges against someone and was imprisoned for that. During the last few days she was terribly agitated. Her forebodings proved correct. She was shot by the Communists."¹⁴³ In the last days of Bolshevik rule a huge trench was dug behind the house on Sadovaia Street No. 5. According to the sisters' report, "The prisoners were led out stark naked in batches of ten, placed on the edge of the ditch and shot."¹⁴⁴ (The same procedure was reported by a different source from Kharkov.¹⁴⁵) When the Whites entered Kiev, they found 123 bodies in that ditch.¹⁴⁶ One

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p. 47.

¹⁴² Gross, *Revolution from Abroad*.

¹⁴³ *In the Shadow of Death*, p. 46.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 47.

¹⁴⁵ "Kharkov under Red Terror," *Bulletins of the Russian Liberation Committee*, no. 35 (18 October 1919), 3.

¹⁴⁶ *In the Shadow of Death*, p. 48.

thousand eight hundred victims were executed in Kiev in the last weeks before the Bolshevik departure, and the total number of those executed from February to August was estimated at three thousand.¹⁴⁷

No wonder all the accounts depict an enthusiastic reception in the streets when the White army was marching in. According to a Menshevik journal, no friend to the Whites, crowds poured into the streets in Kharkov blessing *spasiteli i izbaviteli*, saviors and deliverers.¹⁴⁸ The same picture was witnessed by an American observer in Odessa and reported to the State Department.¹⁴⁹ Most surprisingly, the Bolsheviks themselves wrote that "petit bourgeois" crowds greeted the Whites with enthusiasm as far north as Orel.¹⁵⁰

By early September the Bolshevik occupation of Ukraine was finished, and the front line was rolling northward toward Kursk and Orel. The Whites were well informed on the Bolsheviks' domestic troubles, and that clearly entered their calculations in the prosecution of the war.¹⁵¹ The Bolsheviks were essentially at war with all groups of the population in Ukraine except for some categories of workers. And yet without the movement of the White army all these diverse anti-Bolshevik forces would probably not have been able to overthrow the Bolshevik regime. These forces were too disunited to act in accord. There was little in common between the Don cossacks, who had been counting on Denikin's support, and Makhno's rebels, who fought the Whites after they finished with the Bolsheviks. What was there in common between the Mensheviks and SRs, longtime opponents of the Bolsheviks, and the cossacks, who disliked any socialists? What was there in common between the Mensheviks and SRs and Makhno's rebels, even though all of them were left-wing socialist opponents of Bolshevism? The Mensheviks and SRs were Russian, Jewish, and urban. And that gap could not be overcome.

There was no understanding even between Makhno and Grigoriev, who represented socially and politically the same peasant constituency. There was no understanding between Makhno and the Ukrainian nationalists either. Makhno's forces had fought against the independent Ukraine government on the side of the Bolsheviks. The Ukraine of 1919 had a heterogeneous society

¹⁴⁷ "Eshche o Kievskikh Cheka v 1919 godu," a letter dated 13 January 1921, *Na chuzhoi storone*, no. 10 (1925), 220–21, and *In the Shadow of Death*, p. 23. See also reprints from a variety of Ukrainian newspapers on the Red Terror: "Les Tchrezvychaikas (Commission Extraordinaires Bolchevistes)," *La Russie Démocratique*, no. 8 (17 December 1919).

¹⁴⁸ "K smene vlasti," *Mysl'* (June 1919). See an identical account in "In Liberated Regions," *Bulletins of the Russian Liberation Committee*, no. 24 (2 August 1919), 3.

¹⁴⁹ To the Department of State, Constantinople, 11 September 1919. The text starts: "The following information has been received by special messenger from Thomas Whitemore who went to Odessa on first Russian relief ship after the evacuation of the Bolsheviks," Records, dispatch 861.00.5203.

¹⁵⁰ "Belye v Orl'e," *Izvestiia* (13 November 1919), 3.

¹⁵¹ The extent of the Whites' knowledge is clearly revealed in the following document: "Svodka razvedyvatelnogo otdeleniia po dannym k 19 oktiabria 1919 goda. Vnutrennee polozenie Sovetskoi respublikii." Wrangel Archive, Delo 147, Arkhiv shtaba Glavnokomanduiushchego voozruchennymi silami na iuge Rossii.

splintered into conflicting groupings. They all detested the Bolsheviks and yet were unable to overthrow them on their own. The movement of the White army provided a catalyst from outside that finally toppled Bolshevik rule. An army of 100,000 could not possibly have taken control of a territory with a population of 40 million people in three months if there had not been a universal resentment of the preceding administration.

September–October 1919 was perhaps the brightest month in the history of the White movement. The army continued its victorious offensive; one city fell after another. It was now in Russia proper; Tsaritsyn, Voronezh, Kursk, and Orel were taken. Dispatches of local authorities in these cities betray a sense of hopelessness. Now they wrote to Moscow how weak the Bolshevik party really was. The Bolshevik city party committee in Orel, for example, reported that at the approach of the Whites in early October all the committee could come up with was a detachment of 250 men, half of whom were Communists, imported from Kursk and Yaroslavl. In the entire city of Orel there were only 87 Communists.¹⁵² In Voronezh, which fell on 30 September, the situation was even more catastrophic. The local Communist committee wrote in panic that many high-ranking officials had simply disappeared. Soviet power was disintegrating before the arrival of the Whites, and party officials escaped ahead of the retreating Red Army units. The Voronezh Communists telegraphed: "The Voronezh Province Party Committee and Soviet Executive Committee have abandoned the city on 30 September under the artillery shelling of the enemy. We consider it important to inform you that two days before abandoning the city, members of the city party organization began to flee without any authorization. In spite of all efforts to stop them, by the time we abandoned the city there were not more than 30 or 40 people left out of 350."¹⁵³

No one was willing to defend Soviet power. The White offensive acquired a momentum of its own. The mere rumor of the Whites' advance set the Communists running and the peasants welcoming the liberators. Allied aid was arriving in great quantities: airplanes, tanks, ammunition, and field hospitals. The crop in Ukraine was out of the Bolsheviks' hands. Victory seemed to be close in those days in September–October 1919. Allied reporters arrived to cover Denikin's triumphal entry into Moscow. It was only two hundred miles away.

¹⁵² "V TsKa RKP(b)" (20 November 1919), Ts.P.A., Fond 17, RKP(b), Opis' 6, document 197.

¹⁵³ Priakhin, "V TsKa RKP(b)," Ts.P.A., Fond 17, RKP(b), Opis' 6, document 48.

On the Internal Front: The Greens

AMONG HISTORIANS of Soviet Russia, the term civil war is automatically associated with the frontline civil war against the Whites. Historians have been preoccupied with armies, headquarters, front lines, and governments. But the dramatic offensive of the White forces toward the center of Russia has overshadowed another kind of civil war going on at the same time. It was a civil war without a clearly defined front line that was waged in virtually all provinces of European Russia under nominal Bolshevik control, a war of peasant rebels against state authority. Dozens of peasant rebellions and dozens of Red Army mutinies took place in provincial Russia in 1919. Detachments of Red Army deserters, hiding in the forests of European Russia (hence the name Greens) joined peasants and mutineers to engage Communist government forces on a vast internal front.¹ Peasant rebels did not generate archives, and their actions, motivations, and behavior patterns remained unrecorded in numerous cases. The available evidence suggests, though, that the magnitude of the Bolshevik war against peasants on the internal front eclipsed by far the frontline civil war against the Whites.² More important, in terms of its impact on Bolshevik-peasant relations and the structure of local Soviet government—the behavior patterns it established and routinized—this war had an enormous effect on the future of Soviet Russia.

Bolshevik troubles with peasant rebels are associated primarily with the movement of Nestor Makhno in Ukraine and Aleksandr Antonov in Tambov Province. Since the Antonov uprising started only in 1920 and the Makhno movement unfolded in eastern Ukraine, some historians have assumed that no peasant rebellions of any significance took place in Russia itself in 1919.³ Leopold Haimson went even further and suggested that peasants in central Russia were actually supporting the Bolsheviks during the height of the civil war against the Whites in 1919. They formed “inner redoubts” which stopped the Whites’ assault against central Russia.⁴ Several historians including Aleksandr Nekrich, Robert Conquest, and Peter Scheibert, however, have pointed out that peasant insurgency in Bolshevik Russia was a serious problem, a view

¹ Martyn Latsis used this expression in his *Dva goda bor'by na vnutrennem fronte*. See also “Na vnutrennem fronte,” *Pravda* (27 May 1919), 2.

² Robert Conquest has put forward this view, which I share, in *The Harvest of Sorrow*, p. 50.

³ This is exactly what Evan Mawdsley wrote in his recent *Russian Civil War*, p. 174.

⁴ Leopold Haimson, “The Problem of Social Identities in Early Twentieth Century Russia,” *Slavic Review*, vol. 47, no. 1 (1988), 1–21, here 11.

diametrically contrary to that of Haimson.⁵ A truly revisionist Russian historian has also expressed this unorthodox view: "The majority of historians, both Soviet and foreign, reduce the civil war to the struggle between the Reds and the Whites, the difference being only in judgments. The facts show, however, that there was a third force upon which fell the biggest blow—the peasant insurrectionist movement. In different periods to a differing degree this movement joined either the Whites or the Reds, but it remained a relatively independent force."⁶

The purpose here is to examine the nature, scope, and character of the peasant insurrectionist movement in Russia in 1919, to assess its impact on the frontline civil war against the Whites, and to reflect upon the long-term consequences of that experience for Bolshevik-peasant relations. It is an attempt to create a typology of peasant protest, to distinguish between the Greens, other deserters, various types of peasant itinerant detachments, and anti-Communist rebels. Most importantly, it is an attempt to define peasant attitudes toward, and perceptions of, Communist authority on the one hand and the administration of the new local Bolsheviks on the other.

The Historical Setting

Peasant insurgency in 1919 was a continuation of an upheaval which began in 1917 and 1918. Psychologically it was the same phenomenon, a rebellion against state authority. Within these parameters the actual causes, scope, and character of peasant rebellion changed profoundly in the course of the revolutionary years. As many contemporary observers have pointed out, the Communist revolution in Russia was a realization of the peasant desire to divide up the landlords' lands.⁷ It was rooted in the peasants' belief that land, like the air, was God's and that they, the peasants, had a right to till it and divide it periodically and justly.⁸ In 1917 the brunt of the peasants' blow was directed against the landlords.⁹ Not only did the peasants seize landlords' lands with Bolshevik encouragement and against the cautioning of the SRs, but they also tried to obliterate any shred of the landlords' presence in the countryside by burning the

⁵ Heller and Nekrich, *Utopia in Power*, pp. 98–102; Conquest, *The Harvest of Sorrow*, p. 50; and Scheibert, *Lenin an der Macht*, pp. 153–56.

⁶ Vasilii Seliunin, "Istoki," *Novyi mir*, no. 5 (1988), 162–90, here 166.

⁷ A. N. Potresov, "Nash Prizyv k kapitalizmu," *Novyi den'* (7 April 1918), 1.

⁸ See an interesting discussion of peasant attitudes on justice in Cathy Frierson, "Crime and Punishment in the Russian Village: Rural Concepts of Criminality at the End of the 19th Century," *Slavic Review*, vol. 46, no. 1 (1987), 55–69.

⁹ For an analysis of peasant upheaval in 1917 see Ferro, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, especially "Revolution in the Countryside," pp. 112–40.

landlords' estates.¹⁰ There was to be no *barin* (master) in the countryside anymore.

The rift between the Bolsheviks and the peasants unfolded during the spring and summer of 1918. The traditional interpretation maintains that facing an acute shortage of agricultural products in the big cities, "the regime was forced to rely upon a policy of compulsory requisitioning."¹¹ Some historians believe it was this mistake on Lenin's part that led to the civil war against the peasants.¹² Others support the view of official Soviet propaganda that Lenin embarked upon the construction of socialism by establishing a "dictatorship of the proletariat in the countryside."¹³ It has been argued that Lenin's decision to establish committees of the poor and to requisition grain by force was dictated not so much by ideological considerations as by political trends in Russia in 1918.¹⁴ The most important of these was that the Left SRs were increasing their share of representation in peasant soviets at the expense of the Bolsheviks during the spring of 1918. Secondly the soldiers, who in 1917 had been the bulk of Bolshevik support, returned to their villages and were largely reabsorbed into the countryside.¹⁵ They identified with the peasant desire to own the land and to sell their products freely. Consequently the Bolsheviks' social base in the country was on the decline, and that of the Left SRs, the Mensheviks, and the SRs was on the rise. Lenin's new policy in the countryside was in response to this political situation. By granting dictatorial power to committees of the poor over the property of others, Lenin created a social group in the countryside which had a stake in supporting the Bolsheviks. Political concerns certainly prevailed, regardless of the economic consequences. The most important of these was the withdrawal of peasants from the national market economy. Peasants were increasingly interested in producing for personal consumption only. They fiercely resisted intrusion from outside, and in 1918 they began to attack requisition detachments. Martyn Latsys, the Cheka boss who composed weekly reports to Lenin on peasant insurgency, cites the figure of 245 peasant rebellions in 1918.¹⁶ These were sporadic outbursts of peasant anger, directed primarily against *outside forces*—the requisition detachments established in June 1918.

By the beginning of 1919, however, all political parties were weakened by repressions to such an extent that they could no longer challenge Bolshevik rule, and the ineptitude of the committees of the poor was so glaring that the

¹⁰ Haimson, "The Problem of Social Identities," *Slavic Review*, vol. 47, no. 1 (1988), 13.

¹¹ Hough and Fainsod, *How the Soviet Union Is Governed*, p. 91.

¹² Medvedev, *The October Revolution*, pp. 165–66, here p. 168.

¹³ Viola, *Best Sons of the Fatherland*, p. 12.

¹⁴ Brovkin, *The Mensheviks after October*, pp. 99–104.

¹⁵ Haimson, "The Problem of Social Identities," *Slavic Review*, vol. 47, no. 1 (1988), 13.

¹⁶ Latsys, *Dva goda bor'by na vnutrennem fronte*, p. 75.

Bolshevik government announced a change of course in the countryside once again. The committees of the poor were abolished in December 1918. In his speeches and articles of early 1919 Lenin continually repeated that peace with the middle-income peasants was the main task of the Communist party. It was natural that the peasants wanted to sell their products at a fair price. The Soviet government, Lenin said, would buy from peasants at a fair fixed price. Since industry was in disarray, however, at that moment the government could not pay adequately for peasants' labor, and by fixing grain prices on a low level it was in effect taking a loan from the peasants in order to feed the hungry workers.¹⁷ Peasants needed reassurance that they would be able to sell their grain. The propaganda campaign "Peace with the Peasant" in the spring of 1919 was designed to allay peasants' fears by assuring them that the crop of 1919 would not be requisitioned as in 1918. But as before, free private trade was ruled out as unacceptable.

When Lenin was making conciliatory speeches to peasants in the spring of 1919, the strategic situation looked favorable for the Bolsheviks. Germany was defeated in World War I, and its forces evacuated Ukraine. The Bolshevik forces quickly overran Ukraine and seized the crop of 1918, which had been planted under the Germans. The White forces of General Denikin had been locked in the North Caucasus for a year already, and the French landing in Odessa was proving to be a total fiasco. The Allied forces, so feared at first, turned out to be a paper tiger. In early 1919 the Bolsheviks believed they were enjoying a second breathing spell, and they did not anticipate that the next half-year would bring the White forces within the approaches to Moscow.

Policies of the Bolshevik Government

Despite conciliatory pronouncements the Bolshevik policy toward peasants in early 1919 did not change significantly from that of 1918. Grain requisitioning remained the centerpiece of that policy. From Kostroma, Anatolii Lunacharsky, acting as Lenin's personal envoy, wrote, "We would like to pump out by all means 200,000–300,000 *pud* [one pud equals 36 pounds] of grain from over there [the eastern part of the province], which are doubtless in surplus in these uyezdy. The peasants resist and are greatly embittered."¹⁸ Pumping out meant forced requisitions. The low fixed price was not even mentioned in this communication. The area was identified as "kulak," that is, prosperous, and Lenin's envoy had far-reaching authority to obtain grain however he saw fit.

In contrast to Lunacharsky's direct methods another of Lenin's envoys, L. B.

¹⁷ Lars Lih discusses the politics of this "loan" in his "Bolshevik Razverstka and War Communism," *Slavic Review*, vol. 45, no. 4 (1986), 673–88, here 678.

¹⁸ On general staff requisitions, see Anatolii Lunacharsky, "Doklady Leninu," *Literaturnoe Nasledstvo*, vol. 80, p. 384. This report is dated 11 May 1919.

Kamenev, tried material incentives during his trip across several southern provinces in search of food supplies in the spring of 1919. He had brought with him cloth, salt, and other products the peasants needed. In exchange for grain deliveries these products were sent to village soviets. It appeared that a peaceful exchange of commodities had been organized. At one point, however, Kamenev asked how the village soviets distributed the products among the peasants. It turned out that the village soviets were nothing but renamed committees of the poor and that they distributed cloth and salt among the needy. Kamenev objected that if that went on, grain deliveries would stop, whereupon a local official told him that how the village soviets distributed products was not the food supply workers' business. Kamenev insisted that only those peasants who made food deliveries should get paid in kind.¹⁹ In this instance the local official refused to cooperate with the moderate approaches of Lenin's envoy. These examples suggest that Bolshevik policy varied a great deal, depending on the geographic location of the area in question, on its social structure, on estimated stocks of "surplus" grain, on the demands of the front at the moment, on the structure of local government, and on the inclinations of specific individuals in charge.

The food supply campaign in the black earth region and Ukraine in the spring of 1919 can best be described as chaotic. Several competing agencies were in charge of "pumping out" grain: the People's Commissariat of Food Supply in Moscow, the Food Supply Committee of the Donbass region, Tsentrosoiuz, the Council of Workers' Cooperatives of the South, and Red Army supply agencies. There was no coordination between local and central or between military and civilian authorities. Local soviets, railway authorities, the Ukrainian Soviet government, and the Moscow Soviet government all issued conflicting decrees and orders, most of them ending with the words "in case of nonfulfillment—to be shot." Ukrainian local soviets and the central government of Ukraine, just installed in the wake of the Red Army conquest, tried to slow down, if not stop altogether, the removal of foodstuffs from Ukraine, but Moscow authorities tried to remove as much as possible by whatever means available. The target apportionment for Ukraine was set at 100 million pud.²⁰

Simultaneously the food supply agencies of the Red Army acted on their own and requisitioned food from the countryside regardless of the policy of civilian authorities. The Ninth Army headquarters' assessment of the political situation openly said that army units requisitioned food from peasants without any compensation and that as a result the peasants were hostile to the Red Army.²¹ Kamenev complained to Lenin: "The army of Pavel Dybenko and the troops

¹⁹ "Ekspeditsiia L. B. Kameneva dlia prodvizheniia prodgruzov k Moskve v 1919 godu," *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia*, no. 6 (1925), 116–54, here 129.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 125.

²¹ "Polit. Svodka 9oi armii" and "Osobyi otdel pri Rev. voen. sovete 9oi armii" (24 July 1919), Ts.G.A.S.A., Fond 192, Opis' 1, document 53.

under Makhno [at that time still nominally under Soviet command] were providing for themselves. . . . The one to get bread was the one who possessed superior military force."²² On 27 April Kamenev visited the areas where the Red Army had requisitioned food from the population. He appealed to Trotsky to issue an order to the southern front to ban unauthorized requisitions. But even if the order had been issued, there was no one to enforce it. Similarly Lunacharsky wrote to Lenin that the general staff "took away from local peasants almost all horses, having thus undercut the agriculture of the entire [Kostroma] province." Furthermore, Red Army soldiers wrote in a Petrograd paper that on many occasions they requisitioned food from peasants for their girlfriends.²³

The requisitions for the army were basically of three types: the high command itself issued orders to requisition from peasants; local commanders encouraged license among their troops, contrary to orders from above; and army units engaged in pillaging on their own. All the Bolshevik agencies took it for granted that under the dictatorship of the proletariat the Russian countryside had to support the cities at terms unfavorable to the peasants. In 1919 Lenin's government requisitioned 242 million pud of grain from peasants, twice the total of 1918 despite reassuring promises to middle peasants. The official rhetoric said it was for socialist construction, but peasants perceived nothing but a ruthless collection of tribute as in medieval times. This caused famine in some areas as early as 1919.²⁴ What seems to have angered the peasants most was that they were treated as serfs who were ordered to deliver what they believed was rightfully theirs. This reckless requisitioning campaign was one of the main reasons for the peasant rebellions.

Requisition Detachments

The most hated symbol of this campaign was the local Communist requisition detachment. In contrast to the military authorities, who were interested in fulfilling a quota and not necessarily in class struggle, these requisition detachments were set up as instruments to promote class struggle in the countryside and to dispossess the elusive "kulak" class. They were well armed and had virtually a free hand in the countryside. The peasants' unanimous wrath was directed against them. As a local correspondent acknowledged: "Whatever Lenin and Trotsky write about peasants, our Nizhni Novgorod food supply

²² "Ekspeditsiia L. B. Kameneva dlia prodvizheniia prodgruzov k Moskve v 1919 godu," *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia*, no. 6 (1925), 124.

²³ Lunacharsky, "Doklady Leninu," *Literaturnoe Nasledstvo*, vol. 80, 386; on Red Army soldiers' requisitions for girlfriends, see "Bol'noi vopros," *Izvestiia Petrogradskogo Soveta*, no. 129 (12 June 1919), 1.

²⁴ Scheibert, *Lenin an der Macht*, p. 143.

agents do not care. They have their own policy."²⁵ *Pravda* described a typical case in the behavior of requisition detachments. Upon arrival in a village they would move into the house of their choice and demand to see the chairman of the village soviet. They would demand that he bring meat, bread, milk, sour cream and honey. After eating, they would get down to business. "They shoot in the air, point rifles at the chests of peasants. In a main square they install a machine gun." Searches, threats of arrest, beatings, and lawless requisitions would follow. They would eat and drink as much as they wanted, and the peasants, complained the author, blamed the Bolsheviks. In one village of Nizhni Novgorod Province the village soviet sent a tearful petition (*sleznaia*) to the uezd authorities, asking them to protect them from the hated detachments (*otriadniki*), but the uezd authorities were powerless to do so.²⁶ In another village, in Kaluga Province, the detachment took away cows from peasants and opened machine gun fire.²⁷

The party plenipotentiary on grain collection in Simbirsk Province, P. K. Kaganovich, was the author of instructions on how to collect grain. They explain how a relatively small military apparatus was able to procure large quantities of supplies from the entire rural population. According to these instructions, a detachment of armed men would set up headquarters in an uezd town and order the local soviet to make sure volost' soviets delivered their share of grain; otherwise they would be dealt with as saboteurs. The volost' soviet would organize a similar team for each village and in each village for each household.²⁸ This system allowed armed force to be directed into critical areas where peasants refused to deliver. Such a systematic state-sponsored robbery of the rural population is usually associated with the grain procurement campaign of 1932, yet it started in 1919.

The requisition detachments had as their counterparts the antiprofitteering detachments (*zagraditel'nye*) which the Bolsheviks assigned to the railroads. These detachments too were created in 1918 to fight grain "speculators", that is, those who wanted to sell food at free market prices. The actions of some of these detachments hardly differed from plain robbery. A railway worker complained in his report that at his railway station a detachment of two hundred men were receiving full food rations and ammunition, and all they had to do was search and requisition food from two trains passing through the station daily. They did not give any receipts to those on the trains whose belongings they requisitioned. They simply robbed the passengers.²⁹ These misdeeds reveal much about the

²⁵ "Po Rossii, V Nizhnegorodskoi gubernii," *Pravda* (28 March 1919), 4.

²⁶ "Po Rossii, Nizhnegorodskaiia guberniia," *Pravda* (27 March 1919), 4.

²⁷ "Protokol No. 37 (21 July 1919), Svodki o partiinoi zhizni. Kaluga.," Ts.P.A., Fond 17, RKP(b), Opis' 6, document 114, p. 139.

²⁸ Kaganovich, *Kak dostaetsia khleb*.

²⁹ I. Chekhovskii, "Ekonomicheskaiia zhizn'. Iz deiatelnosti zagraditel'nykh otriadov," *Vsegda Vpered* (February 1919), 2.

early relationship between the urban centers of Bolshevik rule and the countryside. One cannot take at face value the claims of either Bolshevik propaganda or later Soviet official history that heroic, class-conscious proletarians organized by the Communist party were fighting class enemies for control of the food supply. The dictatorship of the proletariat in the countryside upon closer look takes the appearance of a reimposition of feudal relations in which agents of the tsar or khan collected tribute from the peasants and kept some of the spoils for themselves. Peter Scheibert compared this to the medieval system of *kormlenie*.³⁰

Local Government in the Countryside

All these antiprofitereering detachments, requisition detachments, army units, food supply agents, and special emissaries from Moscow were transitory forces in the countryside. No matter how much their requisitions hurt the peasants, the peasants knew that sooner or later they would be gone. These were city folks, outsiders. Even though it may seem paradoxical, the peasants' greatest enemy was their own local administration. It would be misleading to define power relations in the countryside in terms of political parties in 1919. Party politics had ended in 1918 with the destruction of fair and contested elections. In 1919 family clans and intervillage networks were much more important than political parties. The term *kumavstvo* was often used to describe power relations in the countryside in 1919. Pals and relatives of local rulers would be placed in all the key positions from the village soviet to the uezd Cheka. These cliques were the true masters in the countryside.

Peasants were still able to elect their own representatives to the village soviets, which in practice were revivals of the old-time meetings of the communes.³¹ Still, election results should be treated with caution because free and fair elections were no longer possible. An eyewitness described, for example, "elections" to the soviet in the village of Turki, Saratov Province. The new soviet was supposed to replace the previous committee of the poor. The committee that supervised the new elections was appointed from above by the uezd soviet. It consisted of the most "active" members of the old committee of the poor. They drafted a list of people to be elected to the new soviet in advance, and everything went smoothly.³² Elections to the volost' and uezd soviets were such a mockery that even *Pravda* published a number of documents depicting the fraud. In

³⁰ Scheibert, *Lenin an der Macht*, p. 150.

³¹ Orlando Figes, "The Village and Volost' Soviet Elections of 1919," *Soviet Studies*, vol. 40, no. 1 (January 1988), 21–46.

³² Aleksei Dmitrov, "Iz derevenskoi glushi, Turki: Saratovskoi gubernii," *Delo naroda*, no. 10 (30 March 1919), 4.

numerous cases local cliques "elected" themselves to positions of authority because they had support from protectors at a higher level.

In Nerekhta, Kostroma Province, the uezd Congress of Soviets decided to dismiss the director of the uezd Food Supply Department, Barabanov, for his misdeeds. But Barabanov was a friend of the provincial commissar of food supply, Kaganovich, who issued an order to the Nerekhta Uezd Executive Committee to restore Barabanov to his position. The uezd EC disobeyed and confirmed the dismissal. Soon the uezd EC received a telegram that upon the initiative of the commissar of food supply, the provincial organization of the Communist party had decided to disband the Nerekhta Uezd EC for disobeying the order.³³ By the letter of the law, the uezd Congress of Soviets was accountable to the provincial Congress of Soviets, and the provincial party committee had no authority to issue orders to the local soviet assembly. In practice, ECs of Soviets at the volost', uezd, and provincial levels were simply appointed from above. The commissars issued orders concerning who should be elected and who should not:

To Voinovsky village soviet, Vladimir Province:

The uezd Department of Administration orders that you conduct new elections of the village Executive Committee urgently. . . . The following persons must be elected: Nikita Riabov as the chairman, Ivan Solov'ev as a member of the Executive Committee, and Aleksandr Krainov as a secretary. Since they qualify for these positions, these persons must be elected in any case. For violating this directive, those guilty will be brought to account.³⁴

Once established in a position of authority, these local activists gave free reign to an exercise of power that peasants perceived as a new petty tsardom. For them, to exercise power was not to provide leadership for the betterment of their community but to force others to treat them with awe. Even in the judgment of the Bolshevik Central Committee, some of the local Communist "tsars" treated peasants no better than the tsarist policemen. In Dolmatovskaia Volost', Pronskii Uezd, Ryazan Province, for example, members of the volost' soviet and members of the local party cell beat peasants with a whip.³⁵ And in Buguruslansky Uezd of Samara Province the Bolsheviks arrested the local police chief because he whipped peasants systematically.³⁶ In Bogorotsk, Tula Province, "the local authorities conducted unlawful requisitions. Under the guise of

³³ "Po Rossii, Nerekhta, Kostromskoi gubernii," *Pravda* (20 February 1919), 4.

³⁴ The document is reproduced in its entirety in the article "Kak v kaple vody," *Delo naroda*, no. 3 (22 March 1919), 2.

³⁵ "Riazanskomu gubernskomu komitetu (29 ianvaria 1919)," document 41, *Perepiska Sekretariata*, vol. 5, p. 38.

³⁶ "Doklad Samarskogo Gubernskogo Iсполnitel'nogo Komiteta. Predsedatel' A. Sokol'sky. V Sovnarkom" (13 May 1919), Ts.G.A.O.R., Fond 130 SNK, Opis' 3, document 363(2), p. 57.

collecting for the prisoners of war, they requisitioned children's and women's clothing."³⁷ Countless complaints reached Moscow that these "little tsars" requisitioned peasant property for their personal use. In Nizhni Novgorod Province, wrote *Pravda*: "such 'Communists,' and many of them joined the Soviet institutions in the provinces, take away even from the poorest peasants all kinds of household items such as samovars, boots, clothing, and so on under the guise of 'requisitions' and 'confiscations' and appropriate them for their personal use."³⁸ The peasants were defenseless, concluded the author, because the unlawful requisitions were done by their own local authorities.³⁹ At the Eighth Party Congress in March, Osinsky defiantly declared: "A great number of peasant rebellions have broken out recently primarily as a result of the misdeeds of local commissars, that is, of our provincial bureaucracy."⁴⁰ Entire regional governing bodies were guilty of such misdeeds. According to Osinsky, the executive committees in the countryside were nothing but unaccountable cliques, guilty of bribery, bureaucratic hierarchy, nepotism, and corruption.⁴¹

The redistribution of wealth in the provinces in favor of the new masters started in 1918 as a part of Lenin's campaign to "loot the looters." Just as in a regular war, the defeated party had to pay indemnity to the victors. In the class war which the Bolsheviks unleashed, the vanquished class had to pay indemnities to the victorious proletariat. During the first campaign after October 1917, 739 million rubles were raised by imposing indemnities.⁴² In 1919 the practice continued unabated at the local level. "Little tsars" wanted to be rich and powerful. In their behavior they imitated the old barin. They enjoyed being feared. They loved issuing orders and threats. They wanted to show that now their time had come. From one province came a report of a commissar's wedding: In the best house in the village an orchestra was playing, sentries were guarding the entry, and a lavish meal was served, followed by rides on horses. The new barin had appeared in the village: the commissar.⁴³ The author, writing in *Pravda*, was horrified: "Is it really so that in our Communist family we are witnessing the birth of a new privileged class?"⁴⁴ Peasants called the commissars a new estate, or a commissars' estate (*kommissarskoe soslovie*). *Izvestiia* described the life-style of commissars in Tsaritsyn Uezd: "Commissars

³⁷ The Bolshevik CC reprimanded the Tula party organization for that, but ended the letter nevertheless with comradely greetings. "Tul'skomu gubernskomu komitetu (4 fevralia 1919)," document 53, *Perepiska Sekretariata*, vol. 6, p. 48.

³⁸ A. Kurliandskii, "Po Rossii. Nizhnegorodskaiia guberniia," *Pravda* (4 April 1919), 4.

³⁹ See also documents from the Soviet press collected by Sokolov, *Bol'sheviki o bol'shevikakh*, p. 18.

⁴⁰ *Vos'moi S'ezd RKP(b)*, p. 190.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

⁴² Scheibert, *Lenin an der Macht*, p. 193.

⁴³ "Po Rossii. Kommissary gulaiut," *Pravda* (4 February 1919), 4.

⁴⁴ A. I. Zhigunov, "Po Rossii. Iz Voronezha," *Pravda* (7 February 1919), 4.

were riding in luxurious carriages harnessed with three or even six horses. They had a countless number of aides-de-camp and a retinue of accompanying commissars. Plenty of trunks. They treat the working population in the manner of a governor [under the old regime]: harsh bellows and beatings. It is typical for them to fling their money about. In some houses the commissars lose incredible sums of money at gambling."⁴⁵

Traditional forms of authority reemerged in rural Russia. The new local autocrats defined their status in the countryside in terms familiar to the peasants. In Sapozhnikovskii Uezd, Ryazan' Province, for example, a commissar Krestiannikov began his address in every village in which he appeared by saying: "I am your tsar and God! Pray for me and bow to me. I will give you everything."⁴⁶ For this commissar, Communist party membership was merely an opportunity to proclaim himself tsar and lord. The "Bolshevism" and "activism" of these local tsars was not a desire to build socialism but a desire to rise over others, to be a new [*khoziain*] master in the countryside. It was convenient to hide behind the facade of "dictatorship of the proletariat," because it allowed the application of force. The "bourgeoisie" and "kulaks" could be abused with impunity, and their property could be requisitioned for the use of the "representatives of the dictatorship of the proletariat."

How did these local tsars manage to keep themselves in power? After all, they lived in the midst of thousands of peasants who could rebel against them. Their main weapon was the peasants' fear that in case of disobedience the rulers would call in a punitive detachment from the provincial capital. All they had to do was to label those who complained "kulaks," and in case of resistance to report a "kulak uprising." The provincial authorities would show their vigilance in the face of the plotting class enemy and dispatch a punitive detachment. In some cases commanders of such punitive detachments saw the real situation and reported it as such to their superiors; in other cases they fulfilled their "revolutionary duty" jointly with the local authorities.

In the summer of 1919 a punitive detachment was summoned to suppress such a "kulak rising" in Roslavl' Uezd of Smolensk Province. Upon arrival, its commander reported to his superiors that the entire volost' was "terrorized by the actions of local members of the Communist cell." The chairman of the volost' Executive Committee, Fesov, and his deputy Antip, who was his relative, "mercilessly requisitioned and confiscated not only luxury items but also sugar, dishes, and so on." When Antip confiscated dishes from citizen Sementsev, the report continued, he admitted that he was taking them for himself and said: "You've had a good life, now it is my turn." Antip and Fesov also often

⁴⁵ *Izvestiia* (18 January 1919), cited from Sokolov, *Bol'sheviki o bol'shevikakh*, p. 18. See also a similar account in A. Troianovskii, "Sovetskaia Vlast' i krestianstvo," *Vsegda Vpered*, no. 13 (22 February 1919), 1.

⁴⁶ E. Denisov Krasnoarmeets, "Kto vinovat?" *Delo naroda*, no. 10 (30 March 1919), 3.

referred to themselves as tsar and God. The local population hated Soviet power and identified it as a rule of those like this Antip.⁴⁷ In spite of this frank appraisal of the situation the detachment commander fulfilled his duties, fought the Green "kulaks" in the surrounding forests, took hostages, and the like. No action was taken against Antip. No matter how intolerable the Soviet rule was, the peasants should not have risen in arms against it. Once they did, they had to be crushed even if their grievances were legitimate.

Punitive detachments from the center acted in full accord with the "little tsars." As an eyewitness described in *Pravda*, in the village of Pokrovskoe, Churinskaia volost', Ryazan Province, a commissar was killed. The local soviet summoned a punitive detachment. Upon arrival in the village, the commander of the detachment, comrade Eglit, ordered everyone into the main square. To intimidate the peasants, he ordered his men to fire their machine guns. Beating peasants with a whip, shouting, and threatening, he demanded that the peasants surrender those who had killed the commissar. Someone from the crowd pointed at five peasants, who were summarily led to a nearby forest and executed immediately. An indemnity was imposed on the entire volost', and the uезд Executive Committee praised the actions of the punitive detachment.⁴⁸ As the Moscow Bolsheviks admitted, the shooting of peasants by punitive detachments requested by local Communists was not exceptional, but a systematic practice.⁴⁹ In most cases subsequent investigation showed that the peasants' complaints were justified and that the only guilty party had been the local Communists. Nevertheless, the provincial authorities were all too eager to suppress a "kulak" uprising if such was reported by the uезд or volost' Communists. In one instance in the village of Semenovka, Sergachevskii Uезд, Nizhni Novgorod Province, a punitive detachment arrived to suppress a "kulak" uprising. Local Communists handed a "list of counterrevolutionaries" to the commander and all of them, fifty-five people, were executed.⁵⁰ Similarly, Moscow's special emissary reported from Yaroslavl that the chief of the province Cheka, comrade Frenkel', customarily executed people upon arrival in suspect villages to instill obedience.⁵¹

The understanding between Executive Committee leaders and commanders of the punitive detachments was often based upon their personal friendship or family ties. In Saratov Province "fame" about the atrocities of a "gang of four" reached the provincial Executive Committee. A company of pals in Serdobskii

⁴⁷ B. Ardaev, "Donesenie Roslavl'skomu Uezdvoenkemu (6 Avgusta 1919)," Smolensk Archive, file WKP 119, Roslavl', hereinafter "Donesenie," Smolensk Archive.

⁴⁸ "Po Rossii," *Pravda* (4 February 1919), 4.

⁴⁹ A. Kurliandskii, "Po Rossii. Nizhnegorodskaiia guberniia," *Pravda* (4 April 1919), 4.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ "Doklady upolnomochennogo TsKa RKP(b) i VTsIK Dobrokhotova o sostoianii partiinoi i Sovetskoi raboty i provedenii mobilizatsii v Yaroslavskoi gubernii," Ts.G.A.O.R., Fond 1240, Opis' 1, document 3, pp. 1-37.

Uezd had "terrorized the population," as *Pravda* put it, with requisitions and confiscations. They included the uezd commissar, Tuseev; the chairman of the Cheka, Sergienko; the commander of the requisition detachment, Serezhnikov; and his deputy, Fomichev. Together they had embezzled ninety thousand rubles.⁵² They covered up each other's misdeeds, helped each other in the case of a "kulak" uprising, and reported to their superior authorities the intensification of class struggle in the countryside.

A Bolshevik report from Vyatka Province described similar atrocities. The commander of the punitive detachment "killed peasants, took away their horses, rode on those horses with women, and finally burned two villages."⁵³ The Bolshevik Central Committee was so alarmed by the actions of Tambov Communists that in an extraordinary letter it admonished them for their "pervasive drunkenness." In some areas, the Central Committee wrote, "the population was terrorized by the members of the party."⁵⁴ The sheer number of contemporary published documents on the abuse of power suggests that it was a widespread phenomenon all over Bolshevik Russia. As Viktor Nogin of the Moscow party organization put it at the Eighth Communist Party Congress: "in that commission [of the Central Committee on party development] we have received such an endless number of horrifying facts on drunkenness, debauchery, bribery, robbery, and reckless actions on the part of many officials that it was simply hair-raising."⁵⁵ Bolshevik critics dismissed such abuses of power as unavoidable violations of socialist legality. What defines them as not merely exceptions but the rule is their ideological content. The reports made it clear that these "little tsars" had convinced themselves that they indeed were fighting a class enemy and that a merciless struggle against the rich, the bourgeoisie, and the kulaks was the first duty of a Communist. In the atmosphere of class hatred propagated from Moscow it is not surprising that local functionaries defined the words "merciless struggle" literally. According to one Cheka agent, readiness to kill a class enemy with one's own hands was an essential attribute for a Communist in some situations. He himself was asked to prove his dedication to the revolutionary cause by personally executing the counter-revolutionaries arrested the day before. He called this a "thirst for executions." The atmosphere was such, he wrote, that "anyone who considered execution without investigation criminal inevitably would have been seized as a counterrevolutionary."⁵⁶

Some Moscow Bolsheviks were appalled by what was going on in the countryside, as evidenced by the stream of articles in *Pravda* condemning the

⁵² "Po Rossii. Serdobsksii uezd Saratovskoi gubernii," *Pravda* (5 February 1919), 4.

⁵³ "Po Rossii. Vyatskaia guberniia," *Pravda* (6 July 1919), 4.

⁵⁴ "Tambovskomu gubernskomu komitetu (1 marta 1919)," document 126, *Perepiska Sekretariata*, vol. 6, pp. 122-23.

⁵⁵ *Vos'moi S'ezd RKP(b)*, p. 169.

⁵⁶ "Po Rossii. Skopin," *Pravda* (12 February 1919), 4.

atrocities. They coined a new term to explain the problem: "hangers-on" (*primazavshiesia*) were to blame. The solution to the problem adopted at the Eighth Party Congress was to purge the party. Every provincial party organization was ordered to cleanse itself of "hangers-on." A total of 50,000 out of 350,000 were expelled from the party.⁵⁷ This was, however, only a partial solution. It addressed the problem in terms of cadres only, not in terms of institutional change. The congress did not restore multiparty elections, abolish the Cheka, restore people's independent courts, or order an end to requisitioning. All these measures, advocated by the Mensheviks and SRs, were condemned as counterrevolutionary. The central Bolshevik authorities could not survive without requisitioning and without the Cheka.

The second reason why the Bolsheviks could not afford to introduce structural change in local government in the countryside is that they were weak numerically. The socioeconomic structure in most areas of the country was petit bourgeois, not proletarian. Dozens and dozens of *uezdy* along the Volga and in the black earth region, the grain producing areas, were kulak by Bolshevik definition. Despite Bolshevik pressure, at the village level peasants governed themselves through the *mir* assembly renamed as the village soviet. House owners and rich peasants, kulaks by Bolshevik definition, were in charge of those soviets. Bolshevik power came from the *uezd* level when it needed something from peasants. In a typical agricultural province the local Bolshevik organization was only several thousand strong. For example in Voronezh Province there were 3,620 Communists, in Samara 7,000, in Saratov 2,213, and in Kazan 1,348 in March 1919.⁵⁸ Most of them were concentrated in the provincial capital and in *uezd* towns. This means that in a province of about ten *uezdy*, in a typical *uezd*, there would be approximately one hundred Communists. At the *volost'* and village levels there were none. The central Bolshevik government had to live with the "little tsars" because it had no other instrument to rule over the countryside. In other words "terrorizing of the population" (to use the *Pravda* terminology) was a manifestation of the Bolsheviks' weakness in the countryside.

Peasant Attitudes

Both Bolsheviks and the Socialist Revolutionaries paid close attention to peasants' political attitudes and monitored them regularly and systematically. Among the numerous questions they asked, three areas of concern stand out: the peasants' attitudes toward the distribution of land, toward the Communist party and Soviet power, and toward the civil war.

⁵⁷ Grigorii Zinoviev, "O chislennom sostave nashei partii," *Izvestiia* (21 September 1919), 2.

⁵⁸ Primechaniia, *Perepiska Sekretariata*, vol. 6, p. 315, and document 588, vol. 7.

Distribution of Land

In 1919 the SR Central Committee sent out a questionnaire to its provincial organizations and instructed them to assess peasant views on the revolutionary land settlement. What is striking is that in the majority of grain-producing provinces peasants were not happy with it. This was explained partly by the fact that no partition of landlords' estates could possibly satisfy these overpopulated provinces. To make things worse, a migration of city dwellers to the countryside as a result of shrinking industry in 1918 had swelled the number of members of peasant communes. As one peasant explained: "Well, but before the revolution it was better concerning the land. We got, you know, about five hundred desiatin for our peasant commune, but there are more eaters in the commune, about a thousand now. So you can see for yourself."⁵⁹ The government was well aware that land repartition had not substantially enlarged peasant landholdings. The people's commissar of agriculture, Semen Sereda, referred to the 1917–18 land repartition as a dissipation [*raspylenie*] of resources. "Peasants in fact did not get anything through this repartition." Even though 23 million desiatin were distributed among the peasants, the increase of landholding as calculated by the number of desiatin per number of eaters was negligible: in Kostroma Province 0.13, in Vyatka 0.04, in Yaroslavl 0.16.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, peasants associated the Bolsheviks with the land repartition of 1917–18. They perceived the Bolsheviks as a party that had given land to them. This myth was actively propagated by the Bolsheviks themselves, and it was quite widespread.

The Communist Party and Soviet Power

The peasants' positive image of the Bolsheviks contrasted sharply with their negative image of Communism. Communists were associated with grain requisitioning, collective farming, and the banning of trade. In certain areas peasants devised elaborate theories to explain the difference between the Bolsheviks and the Communists.⁶¹ Some believed that there were in fact two political parties, the Bolsheviks and the Communists. The difference between them was

⁵⁹ N. Shmelev, "V derevenskoi glushi," *Narod*, no. 1 (17 August 1919), 4.

⁶⁰ These data are from the proceedings of the First Party Conference on the Party work in the countryside in 1919. Minutes are a bibliographic rarity: *Pervoe Vserossiiskoe Soveshchanie po partiinoi rabote v derevne*. Cited here from a detailed analysis by Viktor Chernov, who kept a copy of the minutes in his archive. Viktor Chernov, "Bolsheviki v derevne," Nicolaevsky Collection, series 7: Party of Socialist Revolutionaries, box 10, folder 14, hereinafter Chernov, "Bolsheviki v Derevne."

⁶¹ For a good early Soviet analysis of this phenomenon, see Selishchev, *Iazyk revoliutsionnoi epokhi*. For a serious Western study of the peasant comprehension of Bolshevik political terminology, see Elbaum, *Rhetoric and Fiction*, pp. 13–50.

that the Bolsheviks recognized peasant ownership of land and their leader was Lenin, explained the chairman of the volost' Executive Committee in Ukraine, whereas the Communists did not recognize such ownership. They, peasants said, were the party of the Jews, and their leader was Trotsky. The two parties were believed to be at war with each other. The Communists were so much hated in the Ukrainian countryside, attested a Communist functionary of the Land Commissariat who talked to the volost' chairman, that "it was dangerous for them to appear in outlying villages."⁶²

In other areas peasants drew a distinction between Soviet and Communist power in the following way. At a peasant meeting in the small town of Klin, Novgorod Province, a Communist propagandist proposed a resolution in support of the Communist party. The proposal was turned down by the local peasants: "Why should we trust the Communist party and not Soviet power? . . . Soviet power gave us land, and the Communist party is only requisitioning, and pushing us into collectives."⁶³ From Samara Province peasants wrote on the SR questionnaire that they could not understand what would happen if all peasants joined the Communist collectives, as the Communists were urging. "From whom will they requisition grain then, because that is the main task of the collectives?"⁶⁴ In Roslavl' uezd of Smolensk Province peasants did not make a distinction between the Communists and the Bolsheviks, or between Communists and Soviet power. They identified all of the above as "*Kommuniia*"—a rule of local cliques. That was the only Soviet power they knew, explained the commander of a punitive detachment, and they hated it profoundly.⁶⁵ From Kazan Province local Communists informed the Central Committee that "peasants' attitudes have taken a sharp turn to the worse lately."⁶⁶ And from Kursk Province Moscow's envoy reported: "One can observe widespread resentment with local authorities. Moreover this resentment is on the rise. In some localities there are frequent uprisings. They hate local Communists, and in many localities they are looking for an opportunity to kill a Soviet functionary."⁶⁷ A Communist report from Vyatka Province in the Urals was remarkably similar: The peasants were most hostile to Soviet power in areas where requisition detachments had done their work.⁶⁸ And in Kaluga Province a local functionary admitted: "There are scores of deserters in Likhvinsky Uezd. There is famine. The attitude of the population to Soviet power is

⁶² N. Pliusnina, "Neskol'ko epizodov iz perioda Grazhdanskoi voyny na Ukraine," *Staryi Bol'shevik*, vol. 4, no. 7 (1933), 84–100, here 88.

⁶³ Vorob'ev, "Kommunisticheskaia Partiia i Sovetskaia vlast'," *Sovet rabochikh i krest'ian*, no. 30 (7 November 1919).

⁶⁴ "Derevnia nashikh dnei," *Delo naroda*, no. 10 (30 March 1919), 4.

⁶⁵ "Donesenie," Smolensk Archive.

⁶⁶ "Ot Kazanskogo gubernskogo komiteta (10 marta 1919)," document 412, *Perepiska Sekretariata*, vol 7, pp. 379–80.

⁶⁷ Maizel', "Doklad o polozhenii v Kurskoi gubernii," *Vlast' Sovetov*, no. 3–4 (March 1919), 18.

⁶⁸ "Po Rossii. Vyatskaia guberniia," *Pravda* (6 July 1919), 4.

negative, especially since some Soviet functionaries have compromised themselves by drunkenness."⁶⁹ The word *hatred* can be found often in the Communists' reports. If the authors were provincial Communists, the local hatred of Communists would usually be attributed to the "kulaks." In the reports of Moscow's envoys and in the speeches of Communists in the capitals, poor peasants' attitudes are reported. Comrade Volin summarized the situation at the Eighth Party Congress: "In some provinces the word *Communist* rouses great hatred not only among the kulak strata but also in the milieu of the poor peasants and middle peasants as well, because we are ruining them."⁷⁰

The Communist party was so alarmed by the peasants' anti-Communist attitude that it summoned a special party conference at the end of 1919 to discuss party work in the countryside. Reports of the delegates from the provinces gave Lenin and the other people's commissars an opportunity to hear alarming descriptions of the tyranny of local Communist cells, and of growing peasant resistance. As a delegate from Tver Province put it: "Peasants identify Communists as people with rifles who come to take away a cow and a horse, who come to confiscate their property. . . . From here stems their hatred." A representative from Vyatka Province related a familiar peasant complaint: "The attitude to Communists is hostile. This we must say openly. Our comrades are coming to the localities, to address meetings and declare: 'I am your authority. I can do with you whatever I please.'" The picture of rural life that emerges from proceedings of the conference suggests that in all provinces Communist party cells abused power and aroused the peasants' hatred. To purge all the guilty, one would have had to dissolve most of the provincial organizations. The Communist party in the countryside was a party of petty tyrants and local cliques. The conference summed up the situation in the following conclusion: "In the countryside the party does not lead the working masses of peasantry. Quite to the contrary. In the absolute majority of provinces the Communists are looked upon with resentment [*nepriiazn'*] and even with hatred."⁷¹ Finally, the Cheka instruction to the local Cheka organizations likewise frankly admitted: "Instead of the broad support of the population, we encounter only hatred."⁷²

The Civil War

As is widely known, the Russian peasantry, who made up the bulk of the old Imperial Army, did not want to fight in World War I. Peace Now! was their

⁶⁹ Tsentral'naia kommissiia po borbe s dezertirstvom. Protokol no. 32 (10 June 1919) Kaluga Gubkom, Ts.P.A., Fond 17 RKP(b), Opis' 6, document 114, p. 130.

⁷⁰ *Vos'moi S'ezd RKP(b)*, p. 204.

⁷¹ *Pervoe Vserossiiskoe Soveshchanie po partiinoi rabote v derevne*, p. 19 in original, cited here from Chernov, "Bolsheviki v Derevne."

⁷² M. Latsys, "Vsem Chrezvychainym Kommissiiam po bor'be s kontrevoliutsiei na Ukraine," in "Rabota Cheka," from the documents of the Denikin Commission to Investigate the Atrocities of the Bolsheviks, *Na chuzhoi storone*, no. 5 (1924), 168–72, here 168.

slogan, and by 1917 they eagerly supported the Bolsheviks' call for peace. Peasants remained indifferent in 1917 to Menshevik and SR appeals to defend the nation. The fundamental fact about peasant attitudes in 1919 is that they still opposed fighting in a war, this time in a civil war for the Bolsheviks, for the Whites, or for anybody else. This attitude was partly rooted in the peasants' local identity. When they were asked who they were, they never answered they were citizens of the Soviet Republic or that they were a class of toiling peasantry. Some would not even have answered that they were Russians. In Tambov Province, for example, they would say: "we are *Tambovtsy*." The peasants' horizon was limited. It did not stretch beyond their province and in most cases beyond their *uezd*. Peasants were not interested in the construction of socialism or in the defeat of the cossacks. They simply wanted to be left alone.⁷³ For peasants, war meant endless requisitions, mobilizations, and troubles. In some central Russian provinces, when the SRs tried to induce peasants to resist the Whites, the peasants expressed indifference: "Shed our blood for the Communists? Let them fight for themselves!"⁷⁴ In other provinces where hatred of the Communists was particularly acute, they welcomed the Whites—in Tambov, Orel, Voronezh, Vyatka, and Perm provinces, for example. Lunacharsky reported to Lenin that peasant-deserters in the eastern part of Kostroma Province might prove to be allies of the advancing troops of Admiral Kolchak.⁷⁵ Communist propaganda constantly reiterated that the victory of Kolchak would bring about a restoration of tsarism and of the landlords' rule. But responses to an SR questionnaire attested that such anti-White propaganda sometimes had the opposite effect of the one intended. The peasants did not know much about Kolchak or his rule. They knew that their local Communists spoke of him as an enemy, and therefore they reasoned he could not be so bad. Landlords' holdings had not been oppressive there, and the return of the tsar was awaited eagerly. "It was better under the tsar!" peasants were saying. The SR observer concluded that in the Urals and the Volga region "peasants are waiting for Kolchak, and they place their hopes in him."⁷⁶

In the Urals, the Volga basin, the black earth area, and Ukraine the frontline civil war with the Whites affected peasants directly. Some of the provinces in these areas changed hands several times. The general pattern of popular attitudes in these areas seems to be that peasants always preferred the administration on the other side of the front line. As one Western observer on the scene put it: "When the Bolsheviks rule them they welcome the [white] Volunteer Army with enthusiasm. After a month or two, they are ready to welcome the Bolsheviks again, all old scores being already forgotten. In another month, they wish

⁷³ Haimson, "The Problem of Social Identities," *Slavic Review*, vol. 47, no. 1 (1988), 17.

⁷⁴ N. Shmelev, "V derevenskoi glushi," *Narod*, no. 1 (17 August 1919), 4 and N. Sviatitskii, "Edinyi front revoliutsii," *ibid.*, 1.

⁷⁵ Lunacharsky, "Doklady Leninu," *Literaturnoe Nasledstvo*, vol. 80, p. 386.

⁷⁶ "Kto idet?" *Delo naroda*, no. 5 (25 March 1919), 1.

the Volunteers had stayed.”⁷⁷ Analyzing the causes of this pattern, a Communist author wrote in *Izvestiia* in 1919 that in the areas adjacent to the front line the Communist authorities requisitioned as much and as quickly as possible. If the Red Army was advancing, food and horses were requisitioned to propel the offensive. If it was retreating, as much as possible was removed to prevent it from falling into enemy hands. As a result the local population greeted the Whites as liberators.⁷⁸ Grigorii Zinoviev described the cycle of popular attitudes: “In the beginning a considerable part of the population dissatisfied with our policy hopes that the White Guards will bring relief to them. And consequently a part of the population greets the White Guards sympathetically; the other part does not render resistance at any rate.”⁷⁹ Several times, wrote Zinoviev, he observed this pattern. When the Red Army was advancing into Ukraine in the spring of 1919 it was greeted warmly, “but after a very short period of time the mood changed drastically.”⁸⁰ In a civil war popular attitudes toward political authority are of tremendous significance. If an advancing army is greeted as liberators, its advance is easier; if on the other hand it occupies territory with a hostile population, its offensive may bog down in pacification and foraging campaigns. Both the Reds and the Whites went through this cycle.

The Greens

The record of peasants’ actions corroborates their political attitudes better than reports by Bolshevik or SR observers. The most important manifestation of peasant resistance in 1919 was the rise of the Green movement. It started in the spring of 1919 at the time when the Communist government was creating a large conscript army.⁸¹ The Green movement can be defined as a peasant defense mechanism to withhold from the Communist government what it wanted to extract from the countryside: recruits, horses, and grain. It was a movement to avoid serving the central government, a movement against participation in the civil war, and a movement in defense of local interests. It was essentially a Russian social movement. The Greens were peasant rebels in the

⁷⁷ This was the view of all observers—Bolshevik, SR, and foreign diplomats. Bechhofer-Roberts, *In Denikin’s Russia*, p. 77; Viktor Chernov, “Moskva, 27 marta,” *Delo naroda*, no. 7 (27 March 1919), 1. See also N. Rozhkov, “Sovetskaia vlast’ i krestianstvo,” *Mysl’*, no. 1–2 (1919), 31–32.

⁷⁸ “Kak iskorenit’ Vandeiu,” *Izvestiia* (7 August 1919), 1.

⁷⁹ Grigorii Zinoviev, “Nasha politika v osvobozhdennykh mestnostakh,” *Vlast’ Sovetov*, no. 7–8 (June–August 1919), 2.

⁸⁰ Zinoviev’s assessment is very similar to that of D. D. Protopopov, who wrote to P. B. Struve in early 1919 that workers’ and peasants’ attitudes made a significant shift to the right. See *Ambassade de Russie*. arkiv. delo no. 43, Nicolaevsky Collection, no. 10, box 1, file 3(1).

⁸¹ Von Hagen, “School of the Revolution,” p. 78.

forests of central Russia and in Siberia, where forests also provided cover. In Ukraine peasant rebellions developed in a slightly different form, but evidence of the Greens' presence is available for every province of European Russia under Bolshevik control. The majority in the Green detachments were deserters from the Red Army, but there were others. Peasant rebels joined Green detachments as well.

There are no precise data on the number of Greens by province. Data from only some provinces are available, and they reflect only the numbers apprehended by the authorities. For such provinces of central Russia as Tver,⁸² the official Communist sources say 50,000 Green rebels were captured, and for Ryazan, 54,697.⁸³ In Tver Province 5,430 Greens were apprehended during the first two weeks in October 1919; 3,329 Greens were caught in Moscow Province during one week in September, and 4,900 in Nizhni Novgorod Province during the month of April. This equaled roughly a third of all men drafted into the Red Army during that period in this province.⁸⁴ In the black earth region, just in the province of Orel, 5,000 Greens were apprehended during the month of May, and in small Vladimir Province next to Moscow, 1,529 during just one week in September.

These figures are incomplete, but they suggest that dissatisfaction with Bolshevism and desertion from the Red Army to the Greens were widespread. The number of those apprehended during short sweeps fluctuated from province to province, generally between 2,000 and 5,000. The official and incomplete Soviet tally of the total number of deserters captured by Soviet authorities by 21 August 1919 was 500,000,⁸⁵ which yields an average of 20,000 deserters per province by that date. According to one study, from the summer of 1918 to the summer of 1919, 576,000 deserted from the Red Army, and during the latter half of 1920 another 500,000. For the entire civil war period the figure is of 3,714,000 deserters.⁸⁶ Denikin's army had 150,000 soldiers, Kolchak's army had 120,000, and the northern White army had 30,000. The figure of half a million captured Greens in 1919 is higher than the combined strength of all White armies fighting the Bolsheviks.⁸⁷ According to Western intelligence, in September 1919 there were 120,000 Red Army soldiers on the eastern front (the Urals), 180,000 on the southern front (the black earth region south of Mos-

⁸² Citing *Tverskaia Pravda*, these data are in *Izvestiia Petrogradskogo Soveta*, no. 240 (22 October 1919).

⁸³ *Latsys, Dva goda bor'by*, p. 73.

⁸⁴ N. A. Semashko, "Kratkii otchet ot upolnomochennogo ot TsKa RKP(b) i VTsIK po Nizhegorodskoi Gubernii (20 Aprilia 1919)," document 377, *Perepiska Sekretariata*, vol. 7, p. 256.

⁸⁵ "Deiatel'nost' poezda Vecheka," *Izvestiia* (21 August 1919).

⁸⁶ Orlando Figes, "The Red Army and Mass Mobilization during the Russian Civil War, 1918-1920," *Past and Present*, no. 129 (November 1990), 199.

⁸⁷ A.E.F. General Staff, *The Military Situation in Greater Russia*, *Bulletin of Information*, no. 1, second section (February 1919, for official circulation only), pp. 13, 15, 16.

TABLE 2

Published Evidence on the Number of Greens in 1919 by Province

<i>Province</i>	<i>Greens Apprehended</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Total Number of Greens</i>
Ivanovo-Voznesensk	3,000		
Kaluga		July	10,000
Moscow	3,329	Sept.	
	1,500	June	
Nizhni Novgorod	4,900	Apr.	
Orel	5,000	May	
Petrograd			65,000
Ryazan			54,697
Saratov			35,000
Smolensk (Bel'sk only)	2,600	June	
Tambov			60,000
Tver	5,430	Oct.	50,000
Vladimir	1,529	Sept.	
Yaroslavl		July	9,500

Sources: Orel: "Massoryi vozvrat dezertirov," *Izvestiia Petrogradskogo Soveta*, no. 138 (23 June 1919), 2; Moscow: "Odumalis'," *Pravda* (3 July 1919), 3; Petrograd, Novgorod, and Tver: "Summary of the Bolshevik Situation from Data Gathered in Switzerland by the American Military Attaché during the Week Ending March 8," Records, dispatch 861.00.4233; Saratov; Scheibert, *Lenin an der Macht*, pp. 398 and 392; Kaluga: "Protokol no. 37 (21 July 1919) Svodki o partiinnoi zhizni," Ts.P.A., Fond 17, Opis' 6, document 114, p. 139; Tambov: "Ezhenedel'nye svodki Vecheka Leninu" (1-7 February 1920), Ts.G.A.O.R., Fond 130, SNK, Opis' 3, document 414, p. 11. All the rest are in Latsys, *Dva goda bor'by*, pp. 73-74.

cow), 35,000 on the northern front (Pskov), and 130,000 on the western front—in Belorussia—a total of 465,000 troops.⁸⁸ If we compare the strength of the Red Army in 1919 with the number of captured Green deserters, it is clear that as many deserted as served in the entire Red Army. This seems the best evidence that the peasants did not want to fight for the Bolsheviks.

How many Greens were *not* caught? Communist sources provide the total number of Greens for just two provinces in 1919. If in an average province of

⁸⁸ British Military Mission, Reval, "Strength of the Red Army: Report on Bolshevism, Appendix X." This report was sent to the Department of State. A note attached to the cover letter said: "Information has been received from Berlin that this report was written by Lieutenant Colonel Wilson, British Military Observer at Reval," Records, dispatch 861.00.7847.

central Russia the numbers were the same as for those two provinces, there were about 30,000 uncaught deserters (50,000 deserters minus 20,000 caught), then for the whole of European Russia "controlled" by the Bolsheviks the total number of uncaptured Green deserters would be one million (30,000 $\times$ 35 provinces). This is exactly the figure cited by a Western authority.⁸⁹ A recent Western source, however, put the number of uncaptured deserters higher, at 1,426,000.⁹⁰

A certain number of Red Army deserters went over directly to the other side of the front line and joined the Whites. An American consul reported to Washington on the situation at the northern front against General Youdenich: "Many regiments of Soviet soldiers have gone over to the Whites, thus constituting the sole means of the Whites' recruiting."⁹¹ Another report from a different source on the northern White army stated: "they are largely made up of Bolshevik deserters having grown within a very short time from 2,500 to 30,000 men."⁹² Reports on the situation of the Red Army at the front confirmed this assessment: "Trotsky has interrupted his offensive [against Admiral Kolchak] because of demoralization of Soviet troops. Entire battalions refuse to fight."⁹³

Not all deserters who were hiding in the forest, however, were necessarily active rebels against Communist rule. For many of them going over to the Greens (*uiti v zelenye*) was a way of life; it was an alternative to conscription. If the Communist authorities did not bother them, they would not attack the authorities; but when the authorities tried to draft them into the army or requisition their cattle, they would defend themselves. Reporting on countless engagements with the Greens-deserters, *Derevenskaia Bednota* described one in Kostroma Province: "They formed an armed band, which prevented other deserters from returning to the army. The Extraordinary Commission was obliged to send punitive detachments. A skirmish ensued in which fifty deserters were killed and sixty of their leaders were shot."⁹⁴ In that sense the deserters component of the Green movement was defensive in character. Its goal was not necessarily to oust the Communists from power but to defend the local area

⁸⁹ John Ericson wrote in this regard, "at one point in 1919 the number of deserters almost equaled the combat strength of the Red Army, as set down in Vatsetis's strength report." John Ericson's figure from Soviet sources on desertion is one million. See *The Soviet High Command*, pp. 78 and 685. See also von Hagen, "School of the Revolution," p. 81.

⁹⁰ Mawdsley, *The Russian Civil War*, pp. 182–83, and Mikhail Bernshtam, "Storony v Grazhdanskoi voine," *Vestnik Russkogo khristianskogo dvizheniia*, no. 128, 299. See also von Hagen, "School of the Revolution" p. 78 (1,761,104 deserters).

⁹¹ Imbrie, Vyborg, Finland, to the Department of State, "Political and Military Situation of Soviet Russia as Evidenced by Events from 1 April to 11 July, 1919," Records, dispatch 861.00.4696.

⁹² American Legation, Copenhagen (15 July 1919), Records, dispatch 861.00.5041.

⁹³ "Summary of the Bolshevik Situation from Data Gathered in Switzerland by the American Military Attaché during the Week Ending 8 March," Records, dispatch 861.00.4233.

⁹⁴ "Increased Desertion from the Red Army," *Bulletins of the Russian Liberation Committee*, no. 26 (8 August 1919).

from state authority, if it was attacked. Red Army soldiers were reported as saying: "I'll quit and go join the Green Army."⁹⁵ In Nizhni Novgorod they were called Green Guards, like the Red Guards or the White Guards. In Saratov Province two names were used interchangeably: the Union of Deserters and the Green army. Under this name—Green army—the peasant rebels and deserters were known in Tver, Yaroslavl, Kostroma, and other non-black earth provinces.⁹⁶

The second component in the Green movement was that of simple peasant rebels who also were hiding in the forests and attacking local Communist authorities. These were officially referred to as kulak bands or bandits. Green detachments seldom ventured outside their local area. They stayed close to home and, as some reports tell us, visited their homes frequently, once every several days or once a week. As a defense against requisitions, they often took to the forests valuables, horses, sometimes even cattle. Their military and strategic tasks were local as well. Enemy number one was a requisition detachment; enemy number two; the local Communists and the uезд Cheka. The Greens were very well informed when a requisition detachment was expected in their area. They burned bridges, dismantled rail tracks, ambushed requisition detachments, and killed the most hated Communists. More than one source relates that several comrades were buried alive by the "kulaks."⁹⁷ In a word they were engaged in partisan warfare against Communist authorities.

The Greens' Organization and Tactics

In Tver, Kostroma, Yaroslavl, and Nizhni Novgorod provinces the Greens were fairly well organized. Detachments had commanders, discipline, and even intelligence of their own. Some commanders were even issuing passports to their envoys asking the local population to assist so- and -so traveling within the territory controlled by the detachment.⁹⁸ A Socialist Revolutionary reported from Novgorod Province: "The deserters had their own orderly organization without any leadership from outside. They had their own center which drafted lists of available deserters. . . . They did not put forward any overtly political slogans."⁹⁹ The Green rebels had close contacts with the village soviets, and in some areas they had their informers in the volost' and uезд and even provincial-level administration. From Penza Province a Moscow envoy reported that

⁹⁵ "Dezertiry v Nizhnem Povolzh'e," *Listok "Dela naroda,"* no. 2 (Summer 1919), PSR Archive, file 2003.

⁹⁶ "Zelenaia armia," *ibid.*

⁹⁷ Lunacharsky, "Doklady Leninu," *Literaturnoe Nasledstvo*, vol. 80, p. 384.

⁹⁸ "Vesti iz derevni," *Listok "Dela naroda,"* no. 4 (Summer 1919), 4.

⁹⁹ "Krestianskie nastroyeniia Novgorodskoi gubernii" (February 1920), Ts.P.A., *Otchety doklady mestnykh SR organizatsii*, Fond 274 PSR, Opis' 1, document 25, p. 41.

some volost' executive committees refused to conduct an army draft. He asked for a military detachment to deploy against deserters and issued an order that the executive committees of soviets be tried by a military court.¹⁰⁰ Cases of direct cooperation between the local Soviets and the Greens were reported from Kaluga and Tambov provinces. In Kaluga the number of Greens was estimated as colossal (*kolossal'naia tsifra*). They got to be so brazen and their power so pervasive that some of them were elected as chairmen of the local executive committees. These chairmen ignored instructions from the center to intensify the struggle with deserters. Instead, "they warned their friends" when a detachment was sent out to "liquidate the nest of counterrevolutionaries."¹⁰¹

The situation was even worse in Tambov Province in this regard. A Moscow envoy reported: "Many executive committees at the village and volost' level without party affiliation are in fact in the hands of kulaks, and they definitely take part in the harboring of deserters." As usual the envoy recommended the most merciless measures, including shooting such executive committees.¹⁰² Documents in the Smolensk Archive likewise attest that large areas were regarded by the Bolsheviks as "bandit" controlled.¹⁰³ Mass desertion reached catastrophic proportions there, and village soviets cooperated with the "bandits."

Bolshevik Antidesertion Measures

In the summer of 1919 the Green movement acquired such menacing proportions that the Communist government adopted a number of antidesertion measures. In all provincial capitals special commissions for the struggle with desertion and/or banditry were formed. These commissions created special antidesertion detachments run by the Cheka. On 28 May 1919 these were reorganized into special troops for internal operations and consisted almost exclusively of Communist party members and activists.¹⁰⁴ Later in 1919 these detachments received the right to dispense punitive measures (executions) on the spot. One more institution could now practice arbitrary rule in the countryside. In practical terms these detachments were given a free hand to stamp out

¹⁰⁰ N. Osinskii, "Ot upolnomochennogo TsKa RKP(b) po Penzenskoi gubernii," *Perepiska Sekretariata*, vol. 7, p. 437.

¹⁰¹ Iaroslavskii, "O dezertirakh," *Pravda* (17 June 1919), 1.

¹⁰² V. N. Podbel'skii, "Ot upolnomochennogo TsKa RKP(b) po Tambovskoi gubernii (29 maia 1919)," *Perepiska Sekretariata*, vol. 7, p. 479.

¹⁰³ "Rognedinskaia Volost' is considered counterrevolutionary . . . clearly seen sympathy of the population toward desertion and to banditism," "Donesenie," Smolensk Archive.

¹⁰⁴ For a brief description of the composition of these troops and documents in Soviet archives describing their activity, see A. I. Aleksentsev, "Ob uchastii voisk vnutrennei okhrany v bor'be protiv belogvardeitsev i interventov v 1918–1920 godakh," *Krasnye arkhivy*, no. 4 (1971), 69–75, here 69.

desertion. Many of their atrocities will remain unknown. Yet some documents on their methods were filed with the Moscow authorities. In Kaluga Province, for example, antidesertion detachments committed so many acts of violence that a special commission of the Moscow Military Commissariat felt obliged to investigate. It collected extensive evidence on corporal punishment, torture, and abuse. The protocol of interrogation of one of the deserters read:

My name is Fedor Bobkov, twenty-one years old, a deserter. I was captured on 7 October by the chief of the antideserter detachment. When they brought me to the headquarters, one of them started beating me with a rifle butt. Together with me they also brought two other comrades. They were beaten too. . . . Then the chief of the detachment came and with him ten men. They told us to go out to the garden. The chief started asking us if there were any inciters among us. Then he ordered [us] to undress and they formed two lines facing each other. We were all lined up and ordered to come up one by one. When I came up they started beating me from both sides with sticks and whips and rifle butts. They hit me about thirty times until I fell unconscious. When I regained consciousness I saw how they were beating others.¹⁰⁵

The proceedings of a regional party conference in Smolensk Province reveal a debate among local leaders on the struggle against desertion. A Communist speaker stated that the problem had started right from the beginning of mobilization in March 1919. By June 1919 in Bel'sk uезд alone 2,600 deserters were apprehended. For the struggle against desertion the speaker, Lobanov, recommended confiscating cattle, executing the most active deserters, and sending punitive detachments into the districts.¹⁰⁶ Kursk Province conducted a "week of the deserter."¹⁰⁷ Promises to pardon those who returned by a certain date were combined with threats to annihilate for those who did not. The Communist press was full of articles praising the "return of deserters en masse."¹⁰⁸ Clearly if masses were returning, masses had to have deserted first. The Bolshevik Central Committee was alarmed that even Communists were among those who deserted.¹⁰⁹ Samara Communists declared a "crusade against deserters," which must have been successful since they reported to Moscow that as a result "the number of deserters quickly decreased."¹¹⁰ At the provincial party conference in Tver local officials admitted that the struggle against desertion took "a great

¹⁰⁵ "Protokol doprosa 16 Oktiabria sledovatelem Moskovskogo voenno-okruzhnogo komissariata," Ts.P.A., Fond 17 RKP(b), Opis' 6, document 114, p. 343.

¹⁰⁶ *Piataia Bel'skaia konferentsiia RKP(b)*, Smolensk Archive, file WKP 254.

¹⁰⁷ "Vesti iz derevni," *Listok "Dela naroda"*, no. 4 (Summer 1919), 4.

¹⁰⁸ "Massovyi vozvrat dezertirov," *Izvestiia Petrogradskogo Soveta*, no. 138 (23 June 1919), 2. Also "Odumalis'" *Pravda* (3 July 1919), 3, and "Kak odumalis' dezertiry," *Izvestiia* (1 July 1919).

¹⁰⁹ "O dezertirakh," *Pravda* (17 June 1919), 1, and "Vsem organizatsiam RKP(b)," *Izvestiia TsKa RKP(b)*, no. 4 (9 July 1919), 1.

¹¹⁰ "Ot Pugachevskogo uездnogo komiteta RKP(b) (Samarskaia guberniia) (24 Maia 1919) Otchet i kratkie svedeniia," *Perepiska Sekretariata*, vol. 7, p. 464.

deal of their time and energy."¹¹¹ What the Bolsheviks were most afraid of was a situation in which bands of deserters could channel the peasants' wrath and lead general peasant insurrections. To prevent such an eventuality, the Voronezh Province party committee ordered the following: "Close cooperation is to be established between the Cheka, the special departments, and commissions for the struggle against desertion in order to prevent the concentration of deserters and mass insurrections of kulaks. One should not balk at adopting the most repressive measures in case of a counterrevolutionary unrest or insurgency. In such a case it is ordered [that local committees] declare a state of emergency and take hostages."¹¹² The Petrograd Communists were even more explicit about their measures against the rural population as a whole:

in those cases when the parents and the brothers of these [voluntarily returning] deserters were taken as hostages, these latter will be set free; . . . those who in the course of the specified dates, that is, up to 20 July, come back voluntarily will be enlisted in the ranks of the Red Army, in case they are fit, without any punishment; and those whose relatives were taken as hostages by that time would be released and the confiscated property will be returned. . . . All those persons, regardless of their sex, older than twelve years of age who are found in the forests during the search after the date indicated . . . and those who do not have a special permit will be regarded as those in hiding and will be subject to being shot on the spot.¹¹³

This document also reveals that taking hostages from the civilian population was a widespread practice. Indeed the entire family was to suffer if one member of the family joined the Greens; the entire village was to suffer if one family in the village helped the rebels. Another order issued by the Petrograd authorities defined the term *forest bandits*: "Anyone who is caught after the date indicated in the forests listed above and in the nearby localities will be considered a forest bandit and will be shot."¹¹⁴ This clearly indicated that entire areas were considered "bandit" and the population in those areas was held responsible for anti-Communist insurgency. As far as the civilian population was concerned, the order continued: "Residents of the nearby villages caught sheltering deserters after the date indicated, or if they are known not to report in a timely manner to the local soviets about all deserters known to them, are also subject to execution." The order concluded: "If it is found out that a village supplies those hiding in the forests with food or if that village is a place for their gathering, such

¹¹¹ "Shestaia Gubernskaia Konferentsiia RKP(b)," *Izvestiia Petrogradskogo Soveta*, no. 261 (17 November 1919), 1.

¹¹² "Voronezh: Instrukttsiia dlia otvetstvennykh upolnomochennykh Gub.kom.part," Ts.P.A., Fond 17, RKP(b), Opis' 6, document 48, p. 212.

¹¹³ "Ot Chrezvychainogo komiteta revoliutsionnoi okhrany Korel'skogo uchastka," *Izvestiia Petrogradskogo Soveta*, no. 155 (12 July 1919), 1.

¹¹⁴ "Ot Chrezvychainogo komiteta revoliutsionnoi okhrany Korel'skogo uchastka," *Izvestiia Petrogradskogo Soveta*, no. 138 (23 June 1919), 1.

a village will be burned entirely." In this assertion of collective responsibility, the Bolsheviks admitted that warlike measures were to be applied to the entire population of a given area, not just to individual deserters, a policy which reminds one of reprisals from an enemy armed force against a conquered population.¹¹⁵ An order signed by Lenin and published in all newspapers on 15 June required the confiscation of property from the families of known deserters, fines, and "compulsory hard labor."¹¹⁶

On numerous occasions Communist commanders reported that the last detachment of Greens had been annihilated in their province, and yet new detachments appeared over and over again.¹¹⁷ More often than not energetic measures antagonized the population and generated new recruits for the Green detachments. A Cheka official described such energetic measures. In this instance a special Cheka task force was dispatched from Moscow on a tour of the black earth provinces on a Cheka train. Triumphant but somewhat prematurely, a Cheka spokesman wrote in *Pravda*: "In general we can state that lately the liquidation of desertion, particularly in the frontline provinces, has been completed." The author touched only briefly upon the measures the agents on the Cheka train adopted to "liquidate" desertion. Some deserters were executed. Also executed were a small group of hostages from the civilian population, because in that village three Communists had been killed. Altogether during the tour of the provinces the Cheka executed "only forty people," some of them Cheka agents, for abuse of power. To combat desertion, the report continued, the Cheka had created new concentration camps. Special detachments were dispatched to affected areas to liquidate the deserters' bands.¹¹⁸

To facilitate the success of the search-and-destroy missions of special detachments, the Bolshevik high command deployed all means at its disposal, including the air force. A routine pilot's report on a combat mission described operational details. Intelligence at the Ninth Army headquarters had identified Tivolzhanka rail station near Balashov township, Saratov Province, as being captured by the Greens on 14 July. Pilot Mikhailiuk was ordered to attack the Greens from the air. He took with him six bombs. Upon completion of the mission he reported that crowds numbering ten to fifteen thousand were approaching from the station of Lopatino.¹¹⁹ The reference to crowds suggests

¹¹⁵ This is exactly how a Bolshevik functionary described the situation. They were conquering the hostile country. See von Hagen, "School of the Revolution, p. 93.

¹¹⁶ V. Ul'ianov (Lenin), "Dezertirstvo budet unichtozheno," *Krasnaia gazeta* (15 June 1919), 1.

¹¹⁷ K. I. Lander, "Ot upolnomochennogo TsKa RKP(b) po Smolenskoi i Minskoi guberniiam (27 maiia 1919)," *Perepiska Sekretariata*, vol. 7, p. 477.

¹¹⁸ "Deiatel'nost' poezda Vecheka," *Izvestiia* (21 August 1919).

¹¹⁹ "Raport. Ot Voennogo Kommissara polevogo upravleniia aviatsii pri shtabe 9oi armii (14 July 1919 Penza)," Ts.G.A.S.A., Fond 192, Opis' 1, document 55.

that these were insurgent peasants rather than well-organized bands of Green partisans. This report, like dozens of others, describes routine daily operations, the movement of troops, bombing missions and artillery shellings of villages. One may almost forget that the enemy in that regular war was not some army but crowds of peasants. The enemy could appear anytime and anywhere. That is why, perhaps, some Bolsheviks developed a sense of insecurity, of being surrounded by enemies.

A document in the Smolensk Archive describes the operations of a punitive detachment. Summoned by the local Communists, the detachment arrived in the village of Rognedino on a search-and-destroy mission. The commander noted in his report that the population in the area sympathized with the Green "bandits."¹²⁰ Upon arrival, the detachment was met by a deputy chairman of the soviet, Antip. Local peasants feared him and hated him so much, according to the commander, that children were frightened when they even heard the name Antip mentioned. Antip showed the commander the houses where "bandits" lived. But there were so many of them that, with the available force, he could not surround them all. They ambushed some houses nevertheless and sent out small detachments to the outlying households.

It was decided that at a given signal, two shots into the air, the detachment would begin the attack on the "bandits'" houses. Antip gave a signal too early, while it was still dark, and a "bandit" ran out of his own house. The men of the detachment opened fire as more villagers escaped. The cavalry which had surrounded the village was ordered to pursue the "bandits." Comrade Nikolaev, the report continued, was shot in hot pursuit. The Greens managed to escape to the forests. The commander suspected foul play on the part of Antip, because he complained that the detachment would leave and he had to stay and risk his life. It is quite possible that types like Antip were serving both the Communist authorities and the Greens at the same time. Antip acted as a guide and informant for the punitive detachment, and he may also have informed the "bandits" that the detachment was coming.

The document makes it clear that these "bandits" were not bandits at all but simple Russian peasants who lived in their own houses and fled to the forests only when their village was threatened by a punitive detachment. The commander's report illustrates how difficult it was for Communist authorities to fight against the "Green bandits." It is also clear that the only people they could rely upon in the village were that handful of Communists who, upon their own repeated admission, were hated by the local population. As a matter of course the commander searched some houses, interrogated some suspects, and took some hostages from the "bandit families" in a small Russian village. It should be noted that there were no landlords, capitalists, or foreign interventionists in this little village in Smolensk Province. No White forces had ever come close to that

¹²⁰ "Donesenie," Smolensk Archive.

area. And yet there was a civil war, a civil war between the Communist authorities and the peasants. The actions of the commander were not violations of party policy in the countryside. The commander of the punitive detachment in Smolensk, and the Cheka train in Tambov, Voronezh, Kursk, and Orel, as well as the hunters of deserters in the forests of Petrograd, Tver, Novgorod, and Pskov provinces, were fulfilling the policy of the central government.

Peasant Uprisings

It is impossible to delineate precisely the differences between deserters and "bandits" or between the peasant partisan movement and less organized peasant uprisings. Peasant rebels were the main driving force in all, and their political motivation was not always clear. Nevertheless, there were peasant insurgencies against Communist authority which attempted its overthrow. One can distinguish several types of peasant uprisings by taking into account such characteristics as scope, degree of organization, political program, forms of warfare, and the social groups which participated.

In the first category of peasant uprisings one can include those that grew out of what the Communists called "economic sabotage." They typically started with peasants rendering economic resistance which then escalated into uprisings. Peasants withdrew land from cultivation and tried to produce the bare minimum for personal consumption. They also tried to hide their crops from the authorities.¹²¹ They refused to work the fields when they were afraid that the crop would be confiscated. They attacked collective farms, as in Tula, or sabotaged Communists' attempts to harvest the fields. All these actions invited repressive measures, which in turn triggered uprisings. This was the case in August 1919 near Odessa, for example. Peasants feared that the Communists would "evacuate" the harvest to the north and refused to harvest the fields. As the land commissar related events, the authorities mobilized Odessa's unemployed and sent them out to the fields to replace recalcitrant peasants. That in turn ignited a "kulak" rebellion which had far reaching strategic consequences for Communist rule in southern Ukraine. The peasant rebellion trapped Communists in Odessa and cut them off from other Communist forces farther north and in this way helped the advancing troops of General Denikin to capture Odessa.¹²² Another Communist observer wrote that one could count "tens of thousands" of cases when partisan detachments rendered help to the Whites in Ukraine.¹²³

¹²¹ For a discussion of these trends in the countryside, see N. Rakitnikov, "Sovetskaia Vlast' i krestianstvo," *Delo naroda*, no. 1 (20 March 1919), 2.

¹²² N. Pliusnina, "Neskol'ko epizodov iz perioda Grazhdanskoi voiny na Ukraine," *Staryi Bol'shevik*, vol. 4, no. 7 (1933), 84-100, here 89-90.

¹²³ I. Lantukh, "Iz istorii grazhdanskoi voiny na Ekaterinoslavshchine," *Letopis' revoliutsii*, no. 2 (1926), 51.

A second category included peasant uprisings which were usually short in duration, local in scope, violent in character with rudimentary forms of organization, and caused by specific grievances. These one can call *bunty* rebellions, the most numerous category.¹²⁴ They were like small explosions of peasant wrath that attacked local Communists and usually invited a punitive detachment. In a typical case peasants would assemble in a village square and clamor against a mobilization order. The gathering would end in a riot, and local Communists would be assaulted or killed. A "kulak" rebellion would be reported to provincial authorities and a punitive detachment dispatched. Upon arrival, the punitive detachment, consisting of Communists only, as for example in Yaroslavl Province, would open fire on a rebel village. (Upon the conquest of this "nest of counterrevolutionaries" the detachment found portraits of Lenin and Trotsky torn into pieces). The detachment would later identify the hostages to be taken.¹²⁵ Countless engagements like this took place all over Russia.

In a report to the Central Committee a special envoy to Voronezh Province explained that misdeeds of local Soviet functionaries, particularly of food supply agents, provoked peasant uprisings there in April and May.¹²⁶ According to *Pravda*, "requisitions of cattle and grain in Simbirsk Province also triggered an uprising in May."¹²⁷ From Tula Province an SR correspondent wrote that peasants "burned Soviet collective farms in response to requisitions of foodstuffs and horses."¹²⁸ Similarly according to American observers: "the rural population of the districts of Novgorod, Petrograd and Tver' have recently organized a vast movement. In most of the districts the peasants are well armed and even possess a canon, machine guns and hand grenades. . . . The reason for the rebellion is the mobilization ordered by Trotsky, the requisition of agrarian products and the discontent caused by the agrarian policy of Soviet government."¹²⁹ At the Communist party conference of Tver Province in June 1919 local officials said: "The entire countryside, to a man, was armed against us."¹³⁰ The insurgency there was suppressed by the use of artillery.¹³¹ Different sources from different parts of the country that were in no way connected all tell a

¹²⁴ See, for example, "Telegramma Efremovskogo Ispolkoma o kulatskom vystuplenii v sviazi s oblažheniem kontributsiei kulakov" (Tula 22 March 1919), Ts.G.A.O.R., Fond 1235, VTsIK, Opis' 94, document 58, p. 53.

¹²⁵ "Dokladnaia zapiska o Poshekhonsko-Volodarskom uезде Yaroslavskoi gubernii," Ts.G.A.O.R., Fond 130, SNK, Opis' 3, document 363, p. 87.

¹²⁶ K. S. Eremeev, "Ot upolnomochennogo TsKa RKP(b) i VtsIK po Voronezhskoi gubernii" (28 May 1919), *Perepiska Sekretariata*, vol. 7, pp. 480-81.

¹²⁷ "Na Vnutrennem Fronte," *Pravda* (27 May 1919), 2.

¹²⁸ "Krestianstvo i Sovetskie khoziaistva," *Delo naroda*, no. 1 (20 March 1919), 3.

¹²⁹ "Summary of the Bolshevik Situation from Data Gathered in Switzerland by the American Military Attaché during the Week Ending March 8," Records, dispatch 861.00.4233.

¹³⁰ "Shestaia Gubernskaia Konferentsiia RKP(b)," *Izvestiia Petrogradskogo Soveta*, no. 261 (17 November 1919), 1.

¹³¹ Chernov, "Bolsheviki v Derevne."

similar story. In Ryazan rebellion was caused by the "banditlike" behavior of local Communists, and in Yaroslavl by antideserter operations.¹³²

According to a special envoy of the Bolshevik Central Committee in Yaroslavl Province, "deserters seized weapons and vanished in the forests." The main body of deserters went into Liubimovsky Uezd, "in which a peasant rebellion is raging now with astonishing fierceness." The local authorities sent out a detachment of seventy men against the deserter-rebels, but these men went over to the deserters' side. Then they sent another detachment of one hundred Communists exclusively, but it vanished without a trace. The same thing happened with a detachment sent out against the Greens in Peshekhonsky Uezd. Moscow's envoy suspected that railway workers in Yaroslavl Province had coordinated a "series of uprisings." Dobrokhotoev concluded that the mass of Red Army soldiers in the province was unreliable and "could not be counted upon in the struggle against the Greens."¹³³

There were numerous cases when local Communists were locked in the building of the soviet and burned alive. Cases of arson were countless. From several provinces came reports that peasants buried Communists alive or skinned them or tortured them or stuffed their dead bodies with grain. In a letter to Lenin, Lunacharsky described one of those horrifying episodes in Kostroma Province: "The Urenskoe affair is of course nothing but a nightmare. Its conclusion was horrible. The peasants killed, froze to death, and burned alive twenty-four of our comrades, having subjected them to horrible tortures. But at the same time I am not completely sure that the blame falls on peasants exclusively . . . it started with machine gun fire upon them."¹³⁴

The situation in Tambov Province went from bad to worse in the late spring and summer of 1919, and large operations against the Greens caused a rebellion.¹³⁵ The uprising in Tambov was ignited by the Communists' campaign to capture deserters. Detachments sent out for that purpose were disarmed by peasant rebels. Local village soviets were reported to be "kulak" controlled, that is, on the side of the peasant insurgents. The uprisings spread to several volosti, and new detachments were sent out.¹³⁶ This insurgency took place in 1919, suggesting that even before the Antonov movement gained momentum Tambov had already been a hotbed of armed resistance.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ "Doklady upolnomochennogo TsKa RKP(b) i VTsIK Dobrokhotoeva o sostoianii partiinoi i Sovetskoi raboty i provedenii mobilizatsii v Yaroslavskoi gubernii," Ts.G.A.O.R., Fond 1240, Opis' 1, document 3, p. 6.

¹³⁴ Lunacharsky to Lenin (May 1919, Kostoma), Ts.G.A.O.R., Fond 130, SNK, Opis' 3, document 363(2), p. 63.

¹³⁵ "Dezertiry v Nizhnem Povolzh'e," *Listok "Dela naroda,"* no. 2 (Summer 1919). Even though the title suggests that the area in question is the lower Volga, the uprising in Tambov Province is also described here.

¹³⁶ V. N. Podbel'skii, "Ot upolnomochennogo TsKa RKP(b) i VTsIK po Tambovskoi gubernii (26 maia 1919)," *Perepiska Sekretariata*, vol. 7, p. 474.

Perhaps the most violent rebellion was in Kostroma and Viatka provinces. As everywhere else, the uprising in Varnavinsky Uezd was caused by grain requisitioning. Local Communists decided to make an inventory of "surplus grain." They arrested "speculators" and those who were "hiding" and "hoarding" grain. As a result: "detachments sent out to collect surplus grain were subjected to cruel extermination. In fact some of the detachment commanders were burned on a slow fire."¹³⁷ There were many Old Believers in that area who considered the Bolsheviks to be the coming of the anti-Christ. The rebellious peasants elected a tsar. With these uyezdy, wrote Lunacharsky "a real war is going on."¹³⁸ The headquarters of the eastern front command reported to Moscow: "peasants got really wild, and with pitchforks and stakes and with rifles, singles and whole crowds clambered toward the machine gun, ignoring the piles of corpses. And their ferocity [*iarost'*] cannot be described."¹³⁹ A special report to the Central Executive Committee stated plainly that the masses of deserters in Kostroma Province were protected by the entire population: "At present, the Umansky area is nothing but a nest swarming with deserters, White Guardists, and counterrevolutionary kulaks. All this threatens the eastern front more than ever."¹⁴⁰

The peasant insurgencies in Kostroma and Tambov can hardly be distinguished from partisan warfare. They started as rebellions over specific grievances and then continued as partisan Green movements. The third category of uprisings was those that were better organized, produced their own leaders, had clear political goals, and embraced large territories. In the vicinity of Syzran' on the Volga in Simbirsk Province a peasant uprising broke out in the spring of 1919 which coincided with the advance to the Volga of the White armies of Kolchak from the Urals.¹⁴¹ Peasants in the area were disgruntled by the prohibition on trading grain, since that was their traditional activity. Trouble would start, according to a Communist eyewitness, when "kulaks" from several villages congregated in an assembly [*skhod*]. "At such an assembly the 'kulaks' clamored energetically against the requisitioning of cattle and grain and against the violence perpetrated by some Communists. Then they passed a sentence [*prigovor*]."¹⁴² They disarmed requisition detachments and seized their weapons. Local soviets openly went over to the side of the insurgents. Entire areas along the Volga were "kulak," according to the author. Communist

¹³⁷ "Varnavinsky Uezdnyi Ispolkom" (1 March 1919), Ts. G. A. O. R., Fond 1235, VTsIK, Opis' 94, document 320, pp. 7-11.

¹³⁸ Lunacharsky, "Doklady Leninu," *Literaturnoe Nasledstvo*, vol. 80 (1971), p. 384. This report is dated 11 May 1919. On rebellion in that area, see also Scheibert, *Lenin an der Macht*, p. 154.

¹³⁹ Vasilii Seliunin, "Istoki," *Novyi mir*, no. 5 (1988), 162-90, here 166.

¹⁴⁰ "Varnavinsky Uezdnyi Ispolkom (1 March 1919)," Ts. G. A. O. R., Fond 1235, VTsIK, Opis' 94, document 320, pp. 7-11.

¹⁴¹ Scheibert, *Lenin an der Macht*, pp. 154-55.

¹⁴² "Na Vnutrennem Fronte," part 2, *Pravda* (29 May 1919), 3.

control over the area collapsed, since the local soviets refused to deliver grain, horses, and recruits. According to a special report to the CEC, this uprising was marked by: "a high degree of organization of the entire movement; by energy, fierce resistance, and impact upon the Red Army units, as well as the presence of considerable numbers of deserters from the front."¹⁴³ In panic the Samara Province party committee reported that "almost the entire province was taken by the White Guards' bands."¹⁴⁴

By Communist definition this was a "kulak" conspiracy against Soviet power. In fact it was a popular uprising against Communist dictatorship. Local soviets elected new executive committees and even published their own *Izvestiia*, a Soviet newspaper. This rebellion produced a case of Soviet power without the Communists, anticipating events at Kronstadt a year and a half later. The insurgents' political slogans were Long Live the Soviets but without the Communists! or Down with the Communist Perpetrations of Violence (*Nasilniki*)! or Down with the Commissars, Communists and Jews! Among the positive slogans the most common were: For the Constituent Assembly! For Russian Orthodox Religion! and even For the Tsar! These slogans were put forward repeatedly in many uprisings throughout the area. The slogan for the Constituent Assembly clearly indicates the influence of Socialist Revolutionaries.¹⁴⁵

The fourth category of uprisings include those with political leadership and the participation of several social groups: peasants, deserters, mutinied Red Army soldiers, and in some cases workers. There were several such cases. By the end of March 1919 the situation around Gomel was very precarious because of the simultaneous rebellions of Red Army units, "kulak" uprisings, and on top of it all a rebellion of "semiproletarian elements" in Gomel itself.¹⁴⁶ The Gomel provincial party organization numbered only 1,965 people and was too weak to maintain "Soviet power," so at the end of March the uезд Chekas were reestablished, and for lack of personnel a detachment of more than a hundred Chinese was brought in. They were dedicated to the revolutionary cause, the report went on, but they did not understand any Russian.¹⁴⁷ The rebellion in Gomel started when an attempt to disarm "unreliable" army units failed. On 23 of March two regiments abandoned their position at the front against the

¹⁴³ "Doklad VTsIKu osoboi komissii po revizii Povolzh'ia pod predsedatel'stvom P. G. Smidovicha," Ts.G.A.O.R., Fond 130, SNK, Opis' 3, document 363(1).

¹⁴⁴ "Otchet Samarskogo Gubkoma (February–September 1919)," Ts.P.A., Fond 17, Opis' 6, document 265, p. 191.

¹⁴⁵ See an SR source on this uprising: "Podrobnosti vosstaniia v Samarskoi i Simbirskoi guberniiakh," *Delo naroda*, no. 7 (27 March 1919), 2, and the American consul in Vyborg, Finland, reported an uprising in Saratov Province at the same time, dated 31 March 1919. Records, dispatch 861.00.4147. On this uprising, see also Heller and Nekrich, *Utopia in Power*, p. 101.

¹⁴⁶ "Ot Gomel'skogo Gubernskogo Komiteta RKP(b) (23 maia 1919)," document 572, *Perepiska Sekretariata*, vol. 7, pp. 452–53.

¹⁴⁷ "Ot Gomel'skogo Gubernskogo Komiteta RKP(b) (23 maia 1919)," document 573, *Perepiska Sekretariata*, vol. 7, p. 461.

Ukrainians (Petliura), seized a train, and moved back on Gomel. Along the way the insurgents disarmed Communists and searched trains, looking for Jews. They seized the Gomel rail station, prison, telephone, and telegraph. They formed an insurgency committee and declared Soviet power overthrown. The insurgency committee sent telegrams along the way appealing to other units to join them and asking for help to block the arrival of reliable Communist forces. The insurgents arrested Communists, killed the chairman of the local Cheka, blew up bridges, and joined with the local "kulaks." Their slogans were Down with Lenin and Trotsky! and Long Live the Russian People's Republic! The Gomel Revolutionary Committee and the Cheka had only three hundred people at their disposal. As a special report to the Bolshevik CC stated, high-ranking Bolsheviks did nothing during the rebellion. They lay low and waited for the arrival of the outside force.¹⁴⁸ The mood in the city was very anti-Semitic, reported local Communists, primarily because Jews were engaged in "speculation." The insurgents staged an anti-Semitic pogrom. They held the city for a week until a superior force retook it after intense battle.¹⁴⁹

Similar uprisings involving peasants, Green deserters, and mutinied Red Army soldiers rolled in the spring of 1919 across the black earth region, striking Kursk, Bryansk, and Orel provinces.¹⁵⁰ The *Journal of the Commissariat of Internal Affairs* wrote that Bolshevism in Orel was maintained in power by armed force alone.¹⁵¹ Local cliques that had come to power during the Red Terror consisting of friends, relatives, and drinking pals terrorized local populations. They settled their own accounts with one another and enriched themselves at the expense of the unfortunate peasants. Each requisitioning campaign "for Moscow" brought them some samovars and warm clothes as well. Reports on the misdeeds of the local autocrats alarmed some Communists. At the Congress of Soviets of Bryansk Uezd (Orel Province) in February 1919 some Communist speakers quoted peasants as saying that the collection of the extraordinary food tax amounted to plain robbery.¹⁵² The Orel *Izvestiia* was even more explicit: "There were cases when peasants who had not paid their tax were kept naked outside in the snow. . . . Some were kept in cold and damp basements for several hours, and then they were beaten by rifle butts on their naked bodies."¹⁵³ The last thing these local despots wanted was a reestablishment of some kind of public scrutiny of their rule.

¹⁴⁸ "Doklad TsKa RKP(b), o miatezhe v Gomele," Ts.P.A., Fond 17, RKP(b) Opis' 84, Biuro Sekretariata, document 17.

¹⁴⁹ "Podrobnosti vosstaniia v Gomele," *Pravda* (2 April 1919), 1.

¹⁵⁰ Information on the uprisings in Kursk and Bryansk (Orel Province) is in "Provokatorskaia rabota Eserov," *Izvestiia* (20 March 1919); on Orel, see Scheibert, *Lenin and der Macht*, p. 155; on Voronezh, see "V tiskakh. Iz krest'ianskikh nastroyenii Voronezhskoi gubernii," *Listok "Dela naroda,"* no. 4 (Summer 1919), 1-2.

¹⁵¹ Iu. Mikhailov, "Orlovskii Gorodskoi Sovet," *Vlast' Sovetov*, no. 2 (30 January 1919), 20.

¹⁵² A. Fomichev, "S'ezd sovetov Brianskogo uезда," *Vsegda Vpered*, no. 8 (16 February 1919).

¹⁵³ This is a reprint from *Izvestiia Orlovskogo Soveta* (31 January 1919). See "Zverinyim obychaem (po telefonu ot sobstvennogo korrespondenta)," *Vsegda Vpered*, no. 3 (6 February 1919).

Peasant rebellion was also provoked by the attempts to establish collective farming.¹⁵⁴ The Orel Cheka had to admit later that "incorrect actions during the collection of tax pushed away from Soviet power not only the middle strata of peasantry but also the poor peasants."¹⁵⁵ By mid-March all except two of the uezdy of Orel Province were in rebellion. Local Bolsheviks reported to their CC: "The end of March and the first half of April were a period of kulak rebellions which engulfed to this or that extent almost all uezdy. It was also a period of Red Army soldiers' mutinies in Orel, Bryansk, and Gomel."¹⁵⁶ Local Communists frankly admitted that peasants rebelled against collective farms and requisitions. Deserters and priests were the main organizers of rebellions. The province was declared to be in a state of siege. This empowered the Cheka to act without restraint, to conduct executions and seize hostages, as specified in the Decree on Red Terror. A Soviet historian cites a description of the suppression of a peasant uprising in Livny, Orel Province: "The city suffered comparatively little. Now they are removing bodies of those killed and wounded from the streets. Among reinforcements which arrived later casualties are comparatively low. But the courageous Internationalists suffered heavy casualties. They have literally created mountains with the bodies of White Guardists covering the whole street."¹⁵⁷ Orel Province was certainly no exception. As the American consul reported to the State Department: "Peasant uprisings are now so numerous and universal, that it is impractical to report them any longer."¹⁵⁸

Maps of the civil war usually depict the territory of central Russia in red—territory supposedly controlled by the Communists—and beyond the front line are areas marked as White-controlled territory. Something important is left out in this traditional presentation of the civil war: the Greens and peasant rebels. The front line of the civil war was not only an external front against the Whites. The enemy could be anywhere, wrote a Communist author in *Pravda* in an article titled "On the Internal Front."¹⁵⁹ There was in every province an internal front of the civil war: a front against the peasants, the Greens, and the "bandits" as they were called. Their numbers were larger than the White and Red armies combined, and they were the only truly volunteer popular army in Russia. The number of Green rebels exceeded by far the number of Communist party members in the countryside. But they were dispersed over a huge territory, they were poorly armed and poorly organized, and most importantly

¹⁵⁴ "Ot Orlovskogo Gubernskogo komiteta (18 Maia 1919)" and "Doklad o rabote Orlovskogo Gubernskogo Komiteta RKP(b) za april' i pervuiu polovinu maia," *Perepiska Sekretariata*, vol. 6, p. 416.

¹⁵⁵ "Vypiska iz Svodki no. 1 Inform. chasti osobogo otdela pri Orlovskom GubCheka," Ts.P.A., Fond 17, Opis' 6, document 197, p. 109.

¹⁵⁶ "V TsKa RKP(b). Doklad o rabote Orlovskogo Gubkoma za April pervuiu polovinu Maia 1919," Ts.P.A., Fond 17, Opis' 6, document 197, p. 67.

¹⁵⁷ Vasilii Seliunin, "Istoki," *Novyi mir*, no. 5 (1988), 162–90, here 167.

¹⁵⁸ Imbrie, Vyborg, Finland (26 May 1919), Records, dispatch 861.00.4587.

¹⁵⁹ "Na Vnutrennem Fronte," *Pravda* (27 May 1919), 2.

they did not see their task as overthrowing Communists *all over the country*. Unlike the Greens, the Communists did see their strategic objective as destroying every single Green detachment anywhere in the country. Controlling the railroads, the cities, the conscription mechanism and the state apparatus, the Communists clearly had the advantage. The problem, wrote a Russian historian, was that "an army consisting of the peasants had to suppress peasant rebellions."¹⁶⁰ And that is why Red Army mutinies were so frequent.

Communists had to be vigilant and decisive against an internal enemy. "Kulak" soviets were disbanded and reliable comrades installed in power. Searches, ambushes, interrogations, artillery fire against "nests of counterrevolutionaries"—that is, Russian villages—these were the measures employed against the enemy on the internal front. Families of kulak "bandits" were seized as hostages. Indemnities were imposed on entire villages after enemy territory was overrun, and deportation of the counterrevolutionary population began. The civil war on the internal front was much more costly, much more bloody, and much more devastating than the relatively quick offensive against Denikin. Thousands of small engagements, ambushes, mopping up operations, raids across the countryside, artillery shellings of villages, roundups in the forests—these were the scenes of war, the war that is associated with the term *civil war* in the national memory. There were no Whites in central Russia, but there was a civil war.

¹⁶⁰ Vasilii Seliunin, "Istoki," *Novyi mir*, no. 5 (1988), 162–90, here 167. This view corresponds to a Western analysis of peasant behavior which maintained that peasants in the Russian civil war "were involved only as reluctantly coerced conscripts." See Theda Skocpol, "Social Revolutions and Mass Military Mobilization," *World Politics*, vol. 40, no. 2 (January 1988), 147–68, here 156.

What Is to Be Done? Soviet Parties Face the Challenge of the Whites

IN THE FIRST HALF of 1919 the popular movements in European Russia, Ukraine, and the Urals inadvertently played into the hands of the Whites. The rebels were not for the Whites but for themselves; yet uprisings against Communist rule made the Whites appear stronger than they really were. The rebellions also diminished outwardly the independent character of workers' and peasants' movements led by the moderate socialists. The SDs and SRs had always claimed to defend workers' and peasants' interests against any dictatorship. Were they now to lead a popular insurrection against the Bolsheviks, at the risk of helping the Whites? How did they respond to the astonishing success of the Whites against the Reds? How did the socialists and the Communists define their place in the civil war?

The Menshevik Assessment of the Situation

In mid-1919 the SDs were indeed in a difficult situation. As the workers' strikes of spring had shown, many workers were far more restive, radical, and anti-Bolshevik than the SD leaders. The Mensheviks' actions had to be oppositional to reflect the mood of the party's constituency and at the same time not so inflammatory as to risk helping the successful offensive of the Whites. It is in this context that the SD leaders formulated a new positive program: *What Is to Be Done?* It analyzed the causes of popular discontent and the sources of the Whites' successes and offered some policy recommendations which the Mensheviks believed would strengthen the Soviet regime internally and lead to the end of the civil war (both with the Whites and with the Greens).

The program *What Is to Be Done?* was worked out in the late spring of 1919 by F. A. Cherevanin, V. G. Groman, and other economists in the Economic Commission of the Menshevik CC. Its recommendations were presented in July. The urgency of the Menshevik appeal was underscored by two factors. In the east the Red Army was doing well, and the question arose as to what policies the Soviet authorities would pursue in the Urals and Siberia when Soviet rule was reestablished there. In the south, on the other hand, the Reds had suffered one defeat after another, and the need for a constructive domestic policy to prevent any further advance of the Whites was evident. Fedor Dan defined the

problem in this way: "Now, after two years of the Bolshevik dictatorship we are convinced more than ever before that the absurdities of the Bolshevik economic policy and their system of terror are capable of only one thing: to prolong famine, cold, and decay, to disorganize, weaken, and lead the workers to despair, to create a gulf between them and peasants, and to resurrect automatically the White Guards' counterrevolution, which is defeated in one place today and which arises in another place tomorrow."¹ In other words the problem was that the Bolsheviks generated popular unrest which the Whites skillfully used for their own purposes. The Mensheviks unequivocally agreed that the main task of the day was to defeat the Whites. But, they continued: "we have to put an end to such a situation as has been seen in Ukraine, in the Urals, on the Don, in the Volga basin, and in Siberia when broad popular masses greeted with jubilation the revolutionary authorities who liberated them from the landlord White Guardist counterrevolution and after only two months began to call for the return of the landlords and White Guardists, who would free them from the lawlessness and violence which is compromising the revolution."²

The only remedy the Mensheviks saw was a radical change of the entire Bolshevik policy. It was necessary to make the Soviet regime more attractive in the eyes of the masses. It was imperative to put an end to lawlessness and violence, which generated peasants' wrath and made them welcome the Whites. To that end the committees of the poor had to be abolished, the requisitioning of grain stopped, and a system of grain purchases based on a negotiated price introduced. The SDs recommended that the Soviet government remove all restrictions on private trade, disband all antiprofitereering detachments, and guarantee the inviolability of private ownership for land the peasants had seized in 1917.³ In a word it was essential to respect the peasants as a class of small producers. To make trade meaningful, they urged abandoning the system of class rationing and abandoning the direct distribution of goods and services by the state. Everything that the state was not capable of running had to be sold into private hands. One should not be afraid of returning enterprises to their former owners, the Mensheviks argued, if they were to improve production.

Foreseeing Bolshevik objections that this would amount to a restoration of capitalism in Russia, Menshevik observers wrote that it was foolish to pretend that capitalism had ceased to exist. Capitalism in the form of private enterprise was alive and well in Communist Russia.⁴ Millions of petty traders and bagmen, despite all the obstacles and bans, were shuttling between the countryside

¹ In Dan, ed., in *Oborona Revoliutsii i Sotsial Demokratiia*, p. 9.

² The full text of *Chto Delat'* is in Nicolaevsky Collection, series 6, Materialy TsKa, box 5, folder 16.

³ Ibid.

⁴ P. Kolokol'nikov, "Sotsializm i Kapitalizm v Sovremennoi Rossii," *Mysl'*, no. 12 (May 1919), 475-80, here 477.

and the cities trading grain. One had to face the existing reality in order to proceed. The SDs reiterated that Soviet power in the form of a one-party dictatorship had generated an unaccountable rule of cliques and the uncontrollable excesses of the Cheka. The people would defend Soviet power as their own against the Whites only if the dictatorship of one party were abolished and a system of multiparty, freely elected soviets reestablished.⁵

These were reasonable proposals. The very fact that they were made and seriously considered by all, including the Bolsheviks, suggests that there were alternatives to War Communism in 1919. No doubt another economic policy could have been pursued, as one was in 1921. But alas, the Menshevik policy would have undercut the power of all those commissars and agents who had acquired a vested interest in the nonmarket collection of grain which allowed them to enrich themselves in the process. The Mensheviks hoped that in July 1919 their proposals would be heeded, because they felt that they had been proven right. Decossackization in the Don, the rule of terror in Kharkov and Kiev, and the reckless requisitions in Ukraine had caused widespread uprisings against Soviet rule. The Bolsheviks' course was suicidal. If they wanted to win against the Whites, they had to reform. This was the essence of the Menshevik message.

Some Bolshevik leaders found this program acceptable at least in its economic recommendations. Informal talks between some influential members of the Menshevik CC and some influential members of the Bolshevik party started in Moscow.⁶ In July 1919 it was rumored that the SDs would be legalized and perhaps invited to join the Soviet government. Fedor Dan was supposed to become vice-chairman of the Council of People's Economy.⁷ The Bolsheviks apparently encouraged the rumors, but Martov rejected these overtures firmly until and unless political and economic reforms were implemented. At the same time the Menshevik CC decided to demonstrate its support for the Red Army in its struggle against the Whites. The party CC opened a mobilization campaign among the Mensheviks aimed to encourage them to volunteer for the Red Army. The Mensheviks were ready to abandon the slogan Down with the Civil War! This new Menshevik readiness to side unequivocally with the Reds amounted to a significant change of policy in comparison with February 1919. Now they believed their most dangerous opponents were the Whites, since their victory would have led to a restoration of the old regime, which the Mensheviks had been working all their lives to overthrow.

⁵ "What Is to Be Done? The Menshevik Program," in Ascher, ed., *The Mensheviks in the Russian Revolution*, pp. 111–17, here p. 115. Extensive parts of *Chto Delat'* were also published in Vardin, *Revoliutsiia i men'shevizm*, pp. 108–9.

⁶ "Ko vsem Organizatsiim Partii Sotsialistov Revoliutsionerov" (a typewritten appeal) (summer 1919), PSR Archive, folder 2003.

⁷ D. Iu. Dalin, "Obryvki vospominanii," in Abramovitsch, ed., *Martov i ego blizkie*, pp. 103–5.

The new Menshevik policy was strengthened by information that the CC received on the political situation under Kolchak. In early July 1919 Boris Nicolaevsky returned to Moscow from his extended trip in Siberia on behalf of the Menshevik CC. Since communication with Siberian comrades had been broken for many months, Nicolaevsky's firsthand account aroused great public interest and produced an enormous impression on the CC.⁸ The Mensheviks organized a rally and made Nicolaevsky's revelations public. He was reported to have said that the Kolchak regime was unpopular, that requisitions and acts of violence were antagonizing workers and peasants, and that the White officers' arrogant behavior and whippings of peasants had ignited peasant sympathy for Soviet power. The Kolchak regime was internally weak, and the people would greet the Red Army as a liberator when it came to Siberia. No wonder Lenin was jubilant when he heard this report.⁹ But *Izvestiia* did not publish that Nicolaevsky had added: "If you try to forcibly implant the committees of the poor in Siberia, you will encounter there the same kind of rebellion which now confronts Kolchak."¹⁰ It was a warning to the Bolsheviks not to miss this opportunity to correct their policy toward peasants, especially since popular attitudes in the east were turning against the Whites.

In his comments on Nicolaevsky's speech, Lenin admitted that a few months earlier peasants in the Urals and Siberia had been set against the Communists, and that now they were waiting for Soviet power because of the Whites' atrocities. Lenin interpreted this as evidence that the masses, having compared the two regimes, had opted for the Soviets.¹¹ The Mensheviks implied that the masses were choosing the lesser of two evils and that only political and economic reform could win their support. The SD party leadership saw its own task in the given circumstances, not in leading the disgruntled workers' protest movement for democratization as it had in 1918, but in persuading these workers that the Whites were worse.

After the nearly total collapse of industry and disintegration of the working class in 1919, the few branches of industry which were in operation were related to war production. These were state plants in Petrograd, Tula, Sormovo, Bryansk, Kolomna, and some others—exactly the plants, as we have seen, that

⁸ A detailed account of the Menshevik meeting discussing the report of a comrade from Siberia was published in "Men'sheviki i Kolchak," *Izvestiia* (5 July 1919), 1.

⁹ V. I. Lenin, "O sovremennom polozhenii i blizhaishikh zadachakh Sovetskoi Vlasti" (4 July 1919), in Belov, ed., *Iz istorii Vecheka*, p. 307.

¹⁰ During the work of the Inter-University Project on the History of the Menshevik Movement conducted in the 1960s by Leopold Haimson, several discussion sessions were held where Mensheviks discussed work in progress. During these discussions many revealing details and facts on Menshevik activity were mentioned. The episode of Nicolaevsky's mission and return to Moscow was discussed at the *obsuzhdenie* of Grigorii Aronson's book, *K istorii pravogo techeniia sredi Menshevikov*. Cited here from a copy of *obsuzhdeniie* in the Aronson family archive, pp. 27–28.

¹¹ Lenin, "O sovremennom polozhenii i blizhaishikh zadachakh Sovetskoi Vlasti" (4 July 1919), in Belov, ed., *Iz istorii Vecheka*, p. 307.

had been strongly affected by anti-Bolshevik disturbances. Printers, railroad workers, and metalworkers in the defense industry tended to be critical of, if not outright hostile to, the Bolsheviks.

After the fall of Orel it was widely believed that Denikin's offensive would continue toward Tula and then Moscow. The loss of Tula would deprive the Red Army of one of its most important munitions plants and would make the defense of Moscow difficult. In both Tula and Bryansk the Mensheviks had only recently held majorities in the city Soviets before they were expelled, and they had a large and old constituency of supporters. The SD leaders decided to campaign actively to arouse workers against Denikin in these industrial cities south of Moscow. By the fall of 1919, however, the Tula Mensheviks were driven underground. They were not allowed to campaign for anything in Tula, not even for Soviet power. The Tula Communists were so frightened by the strikes of the previous spring that no oppositional activity of any kind by the local SDs was tolerated.

The Menshevik CC delegation arrived in Tula on 11 October.¹² The Tula authorities were suspicious and hostile. After three days of difficult negotiations it took special intervention from Moscow to force the Tula Communist authorities to allow the Moscow Mensheviks to campaign for Soviet power. The Mensheviks discovered that workers knew very little about the official SD party position on the civil war: they were surprised to hear that the CC called on them to fight against Denikin. Workers had been told by the Communist press that the Mensheviks were counterrevolutionaries like Denikin. One worker explained that the workers did not know Denikin or what he stood for. But they did know the Mensheviks. So if the Mensheviks supported Denikin, workers reasoned, he could not have been so bad—a conclusion contrary to the one intended by Bolshevik propaganda.¹³ Whether Lenin was aware of this Menshevik assessment of the Tula workers' political outlook, he must have shared it, since on 20 October he wrote to the Tula Bolsheviks: "The masses in Tula are far from being for us."¹⁴

The Moscow SDs patiently explained to the workers the dangers Denikin's victory posed for the cause of the revolution. Fedor Dan in his appeal to workers defined the White regime as an alliance of *déclassé* officers, who had been led to an animal hatred of the Bolsheviks by the repressions they had been subjected to, with a grouping of landowners, industrialists, and liberal politicians who cared least of all about workers or the Russian revolution but first and foremost about their lost position in society, their property and privileges. Their victory, according to Dan, could signify only a defeat of the Russian revolution. He

¹² "Tula," a report of the SD delegation to the CC (19 November 1919), in Dan, ed., *Oborona Revoliutsii i Sotsial Demokratiia*.

¹³ A Report of the SD delegation to the CC (19 November 1919), *ibid*.

¹⁴ Lenin to G. N. Kaminsky, D. P. Os'kin, and V. I. Mezhlauk (20 October 1919), *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 51, p. 65.

called on the workers to defend the Russian revolution, not the Bolshevik dictatorship.¹⁵ Alas, the effects of this campaign were meager. In its report to the CC, the delegation regretted that it was impossible to achieve much in such a short period of time. Worker audiences seemed to have been bored and uninterested when lectured about the dangers of the Whites. They had heard it all before from Agitprop (Agitation and Propaganda Department) functionaries. They tended to liven up when Menshevik speakers mentioned that the SD party remained in opposition to the Bolsheviks, and they urged it to introduce political reforms. The report stated that the majority of workers seemed to be indifferent to the fate of Soviet power.¹⁶ And some favored the arrival of the Whites. Undisguised sympathy to Denikin was evident among the workers, especially in areas where the Cheka was particularly brutal. D. A. Ermansky's report on the attitudes of workers in Tver was remarkably similar.¹⁷ Since the Mensheviks' goal was to arouse anti-White feelings, their admission that anti-Communist attitudes persisted and sympathy to the Whites was common merits attention.

The political atmosphere in these provincial cities tended to underscore how naive it was for the Mensheviks to expect democratic political reforms from the Communists. The Cheka agents watched carefully what the Mensheviks were saying. The parts of their speeches critical of the Bolsheviks were not reported by the Communist press. Most speeches were not published at all. All requests to allow local Mensheviks to resume their activity or publications were rejected. The Mensheviks' report suggests that their party, the one that claimed to be a party of workers' opposition to the Bolshevik dictatorship, was out of touch with the workers. They had little to offer the workers other than hopes of democratization under the Bolsheviks, the same Bolsheviks who had shot strikers only a few months earlier. This encounter between official party leaders and the workers, in cities that used to be bastions of Menshevik support, illustrates a more general problem we will encounter again and again, namely, a gap between the leaders of all parties and the masses during the civil war. The masses had their own fears and hopes, struggles and interests. They were not interested in the civil war against the Whites but in their bread rations and their rights. The party leaders, in this case Bolshevik and Menshevik, appeared to them as outside agitators who wanted something from them but were not offering anything but promises in return.

Despite the workers' strikes and widespread anti-Bolshevik uprisings, the Menshevik leaders decided to support the Reds even if their own worker constituency was reluctant to do so. It was not the first time in post-October history that party policy was not in tune with the mood of the masses. Immediately after October 1917 workers had been in a euphoric pro-Bolshevik mood, and

¹⁵ Dan, ed., *Oborona Revoliutsii i Sotsial Demokratiiia*, p. 10.

¹⁶ The Bryansk region, excerpt from the local organization's report (November 1919), *ibid.*

¹⁷ Ermansky, "In Tver'," a report of the SD delegation (October 1919), *ibid.*

the party leadership's critical view of the Bolsheviks was unpopular. Now the situation was reversed. It was the party leaders who were taking a pro-Bolshevik position and it was the workers who were reluctant to follow the Menshevik urging to support the Communists.

The Right Mensheviks

The official position of the Menshevik Central Committee did not of course reflect the views of all those who considered themselves to be Mensheviks. The old division of 1917 between the defensists and the internationalists which had developed into a division between Right and Left Mensheviks in 1918 continued in 1919 as well. In 1918 the Right Mensheviks controlled numerous provincial party organizations and competed for the leadership of the entire party. In 1919, however, after the long months of Red Terror, any Right Mensheviks who had escaped arrest were underground. They could no longer exist legally, let alone compete for a majority in the CC.

Throughout 1919 an intellectual and philosophical debate between the Right and Center-Left Social Democrats continued unabated, despite the seeming untimeliness of such debates during the civil war. Yet for Social Democrats of all countries the issues of the future of capitalism and socialism were of tremendous importance. They touched upon the very essence of their political philosophy, their very *raison d'être*. Were capitalism and democracy irreconcilable? Was the industrialized world entering the stage of Communist revolutions? Had capitalism as a system exhausted its potential? Was Soviet Communism reformable in the direction of democratization? The Right Mensheviks gave no as the answer to all four questions.¹⁸

The only proposition which the Right Mensheviks shared with Martov was that after the end of World War I the industrialized world had entered a new historical epoch. Unlike Martov, the Right Mensheviks did not believe it was going to be an epoch of socialist revolutions. "There cannot be and will not be any Communist revolution in Western Europe," wrote the Right Mensheviks, but what there will be is a progressive democratization of Western societies on the basis of capitalism.¹⁹ Revolutions had occurred only in defeated countries, and even there, with the exception of Russia, one witnessed cooperation between the working class and the bourgeoisie. "We think, therefore, that in

¹⁸ There are two important documents of Right Mensheviks in this context: "Proekt osnovnykh polozhenii platformy," a typewritten document (December 1918, early 1919), series 6, box 5, folder 36. A handwritten inscription at the bottom of the page identifies as authors Potresov and his group. See also "O polozhenii v Sovetskoi Rossii. Doklad pravyykh men'shevikov," series 6, box 5, folder 27, and a letter of Potresov to Branting, a Swedish Social Democrat, "Bud Till Branting," *Morgon Tid* (8 January 1956, Stockholm), series 6, box 5, folder 34. All of these documents are in the Nicolaevsky Collection.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, "Proekt osnovnykh polozhenii platformy."

Europe there will be not a final struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie but a process of healing the wounds of war."²⁰ The working class in all cultured countries will become a partner in the democratic political process: "therefore the power of the proletariat can only be realized in a properly elected government backed by the majority of the population."²¹

This assessment of political trends in Europe after the Great War suggests that these orthodox Russian Marxists were in the mainstream of the intellectual development of European social democracy. They came to reject the very necessity of a proletarian revolution, given the potential for democratization in the West. Where they differed from the Western SDs was in their judgment of Russian Bolshevism. Whereas in Europe the myth would exist for decades that the Communist revolution had ushered in the rule of workers in the one and only proletarian state, the Right Mensheviks regarded Bolshevik rule as neither socialist nor proletarian. Bolshevism in Russia, according to their analysis, was the result of Russia's devastation in World War I. Socialism implied a stage of development superior to Capitalism, whereas in Russia the Communists had seized power not because of Russia's superior development but because of a lack of development of higher forms of capitalist production.²² Similarly, Communist rule was not proletarian because: "the proletariat, in whose name Russia is being led to ruin now, partly has withered away since the main branches of industry have been destroyed; partly has become a pensioner, supported by commissarautocracy; partly it has entered the ranks of the new bureaucracy. In all cases it has become corrupted and has ceased to be a class in the European sense of the word."²³

Thus the Right Mensheviks, who were supposed to believe in the savior role of the working class in history, rejected this Marxist premise as well. They considered it a mockery that the Bolsheviks claimed to have created a new society. "The Bolsheviks have created not a new society but the old one upside down. Their new building differs from the old one only in that the class privileges have passed on from the bourgeoisie to the so-called 'worker and peasant government.'"²⁴ The new ruling elite, according to the Right Mensheviks, was much worse than the one under the old regime because it usurped control over the entire country, not just over the means of production, but also over the army, the police, the economy, and even the thought of citizens. The Communist party elite was turning into a "new estate" [*soslovie*] or a new privileged class. What we are witnessing, wrote the right Mensheviks is an

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² "Ot Petrogradskoi gruppy Men'shevikov Shvedskim Totarishcham" (a typewritten document, most likely written at the end of 1918 or early 1919 by Petrograd Mensheviks grouped around Potresov). Nicolaevsky Collection, series 6, box 5, folder 36.

²³ Ibid., "Proekt osnovnykh polozhenii platformy."

²⁴ S. Devdariani (San), "K smene vlasti," *Mysl'*, no. 14 (June 1919), 589–94, here 591.

emergence of a system *unforeseen by Marxism*.²⁵ Neither did the Right Mensheviks believe in the capacity of the Bolshevik government to organize the economic life of the country. In a May Day 1919 leaflet they proclaimed:

Everywhere, where Soviet power appears: in central Russia, on the Volga, in the Urals, in Odessa, and on the Don, as if by magic food disappears, the prices of all commodities rise incredibly, and rail traffic stops. Life comes to a standstill. Hatred is incited. Blood is being spilled. . . . The Bolsheviks have disgraced socialism. . . . There cannot be any peace between the murderer and the victim. There cannot be any reconciliation between the conscious proletariat and the power which oppresses him. There is nothing more ruinous for the country than Bolshevism.²⁶

This leaflet ended with the slogans Down with Soviet Power! Long Live the Constituent Assembly!

The Right Mensheviks' political analysis of the post-World War I trends of development was serious and innovative. Applying Marxist criteria of social analysis, they came to the conclusion that the new regime had the ominous features of an unprecedented system that was neither capitalism nor socialism as these concepts were understood in European thought. The Right Mensheviks came close to defining what was going to be called totalitarianism much later.

One of the reasons that the Right Mensheviks could not offer easy solutions to the platform: What Is to Be Done? was that they, unlike Martov, did not believe in the possibility of Soviet reform and were uncertain about the prospect of the Whites' victory. They regarded the civil war between the Reds and the Whites as an extension of the civil war of both with the Greens. Peasants resisted both the Reds' requisitioning and the Whites' attempts to restore landlords' holdings:

The civil war is sucking the last drops out of the economic organism of the country. That it is so protracted can be explained precisely by the fact that the interior of the country rests upon the clods of the anti-Communist peasantry. And if Kolchak and Denikin's officers and volunteers had not yearned to restore the old regime, which fills the peasantry with apprehension for the fate of the lands now in its possession, the Red Army would not have been able to crush the Whites, just as it is unable to crush the peasant insurgency.²⁷

The sympathies of the authors of this document are clearly on the side of the peasants, and of the three contesting forces they would clearly have sided with

²⁵ "O polozhenii v Sovetskoi Rossii. Doklad pravyykh men'shevikov," Nicolaevsky Collection, series 6, box 5, folder 27.

²⁶ A May Day leaflet of the underground group of Right Mensheviks, Stepan Inanovich (Portugeis) Archive.

²⁷ "O polozhenii v Sovetskoi Rossii. Doklad pravyykh men'shevikov," Nicolaevsky Collection, series 6, box 5, folder 27.

them. But unlike the SRs, the Right Mensheviks did not strive to organize peasant rebel armies, because as urban intellectuals or as proponents of the working class and capitalism they feared a peasantization of Russia, which in their view could retard capitalist development and hence progress itself.

In general terms the Right Mensheviks' platform suggested that the SDs were to support healthy forces in society which would lead toward a restoration of all that the Bolsheviks had destroyed: normal economic activity, capitalist enterprise, the working class as a class of producers, political parties, the press, and parliamentarianism. "It is necessary to restructure the entire policy and to choose as a guiding principle the inevitability and necessity of capitalism."²⁸ Since capitalism was being restored under the Whites, since some semblance of normality was returning to the areas under Denikin, especially in the early stages, some Right Mensheviks came to the conclusion that if they had to choose between the Reds and the Whites, they would reluctantly prefer the latter, in the hope that the bourgeoisie and workers would find a way to hold the generals in check.²⁹ In other words these Right Mensheviks preferred to work within the system established by the Whites in order to democratize it in the future.

The Menshevik Central Committee was very worried by such trends in the party. It wrote to the local organizations: "In some parts of Ukraine occupied by Denikin's forces, some members of the RSDWP are conducting an opportunistic policy which is clearly designed to adapt to Denikin's regime in hopes, incredible as they are, of its democratization."³⁰ The Central Committee considered this policy inadmissible and threatened to expel from the party those who promoted it. But the label of opportunism was unfair. Left Social Democrats who happened to be on Red territory or Right SDs who happened to be on White territory could pursue their political objectives under semilegal conditions. It was much more risky to do so for Right Mensheviks in Petrograd and for Left Mensheviks in Kharkov. Since rank-and-file SDs risked their lives to support a Right Menshevik position on Red territory or a Left Menshevik position on White territory, it would appear that they upheld those views sincerely and not out of an opportunistic adaptation to local conditions.

Had it not been for the offensive of the Whites, one would have had the impression that there were hardly any Right Mensheviks left by 1919. Yet when Denikin overran huge territories in the south, the constellation of political forces in the camp of the socialist parties did not look as far tilted to the left as it appeared to be on the Red-held territory. We learn from a letter of Martov to a

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Such sentiments were expressed in several Right Menshevik publications, for example in S. Devdariani (San), "K smene vlasti," *Mysl'*, no. 14 (June 1919), 589–94, and in "Na Perelome," *Nachalo* (29 June 1919), 1.

³⁰ "Rezoliutsiia TsKa" (30 August 1919), Nicolaevsky Collection, series 6, box 5, folder 3.

colleague that an intense struggle between the Left and Right Mensheviks was going on throughout 1919. It became sharper, he wrote, when the CC decided to take the side of the Reds in the armed struggle against the Whites: "In the center and in the north the Right [Mensheviks] as a general rule remained in the position of a 'loyal opposition' criticizing us but refraining from implementing our policy. Neither did they try on a grand scale to carry out their own policy. That is why in this region we got away without a party split."³¹

In the east and south, Martov went on, it was much worse. The Central Committee expelled the entire Saratov party organization for actively opposing the line of the Central Committee. In Kharkov, San and S. M. Zaretskaia (formerly CC members) openly split from the left-wing city SD organization and supported the White administration. In Ekaterinoslav a group of party members quit the party in protest against an appeal to fight Denikin. In Odessa, admitted Martov, the entire organization was right-wing, the same as it was in Rostov-on-Don. The Right Mensheviks also controlled local organizations in Samara, Kazan, and Arkhangelsk.³² The Right Mensheviks would have controlled at least half of the party organizations had open and democratic elections to a party congress been possible.

In certain cases the distinction between Right and Left Mensheviks was blurred, however. All Right Mensheviks shared a negative view of Bolshevism, but since the Whites had instigated pogroms, some Right Mensheviks followed the Left Mensheviks' call to enlist in the Red Army and fight the Whites. Solomon Shvarts later recalled that even such an outspoken leader of the Right Mensheviks as Mark Lieber, an ardent opponent of Bolshevism, favored joining the Red Army in order to fight the Whites.³³ On the other hand there were left-wing Mensheviks who generally favored Martov's view of a possible Soviet democratization, but having experienced the atrocities of the Cheka in Kharkov, for example, on the eve of Soviet departure in June 1919, they changed their minds, now firm in their belief that "nothing" could be worse. This did not convert them into supporters of the Whites. They were against both. As Grigorii Aronson explained: "I defended the point of view that we had to be neutral in this civil war. Unfortunately, we cannot be for the Whites, because they are instigating pogroms. And we cannot be for the Reds, because they are also instigating violence."³⁴

The frontline civil war between the Reds and the Whites cut across the Menshevik party. All Mensheviks detested both dictatorships, but some were willing to side with the Reds whereas others found this impossible and in fact were more inclined to accept the rule of the Whites. The SD party as a whole, it

³¹ Iu. O. Martov to E. L. Broido (26 June 1920), *ibid.*, series 17, box 51, folder 9.

³² Dalin, *Men'shevizm v period Sovetskoi vlasti*, p. 115.

³³ *Obsuzhdenie*, Aronson Archive, p. 27.

³⁴ *Ibid.* p. 58.

can be argued, split along new factional lines over the issue. The party factions found themselves on opposite sides of the Red-versus-White barricade. This weakened the independent role of the Mensheviks in the frontline civil war.

The SRs and the White Threat

Across the huge expanse of Russia, Ukraine, and Siberia, an SR party member could have been encountered in a variety of roles during the civil war: as a Red Army soldier drafted against his will, as a soldier in a White army, as a Green rebel fighting against the Reds or the Whites, as a member of a city дума on White territory in opposition to the Whites' administration, as a member of a workers' soviet (in very few places) in opposition to the Bolsheviks, as a leader of an underground network under Kolchak in Omsk or Irkutsk or under Lenin in Moscow or Tambov. The diversity of the SRs' political roles poses the question, Did this party have a stand in the civil war? How did its policy contribute to the unfolding of the political and military situation?

After a period of repressions in the spring of 1919 and following their ill-fated "legalization," the SRs were able to convene a party conference in Moscow in June. The Bolsheviks had to stomach this anti-Communist gathering because the SRs were still a powerful political force in Siberia and repressions against them in Moscow could have had an adverse effect on the SRs' resistance to the Whites. Delegates from twenty-five provinces were represented at the conference, mostly from Communist-held territory. The Ninth SR Party Conference showed that even though the SR party had become smaller compared with its size in 1917, when it boasted one million members, it still had a huge constituency. The exact statistics were not provided for security reasons, but data on the provincial delegations suggest that the SRs had large peasant organizations in the countryside that numerically could well challenge the Bolshevik ones.³⁵

One of the most important questions on the agenda was the policy toward the Communists in view of the Whites' offensive. On the one hand the Communist Red Army was fighting the hated Whites. On the other hand the Red Army was fighting peasant rebels, the Greens in Soviet Russia. Who was the party to support: the peasants against the Communists or the Communists against the Whites? What was the party to do in this triangular civil war? The resolution of the SR party conference on Bolshevism was even more critical than that of the right Mensheviks: "Having rejected the key principles of socialism—freedom and democracy—and having replaced them with the dictatorship and tyranny of a tiny minority over the majority [of the population], the Bolsheviks have

³⁵ "Deviati Sovet Partii Sotsialistov Revoliutsionerov," *Dela naroda*, no. 2 (no date indicated, underground publication, summer 1919), PSR Archive, folder 2003.

crossed themselves out from the ranks of the socialists. In the people's conscience they have become enemies who have enslaved the people."³⁶

Like the Right Mensheviks, the SRs saw the cause of the country's economic catastrophe in the Communists' doctrinaire attempt to destroy capitalism and the free market. The Bolshevik ban on trade led to a situation in which the entire country was engaged in petty trade. Large-scale capitalist trading houses were destroyed, but millions of petty traders were the only source of food supplies. Bolshevik economic policies were ruining the country and prolonging the civil war. The Bolsheviks had no agrarian policy at all, only a food supply policy. Peasants were merely a source of "surplus" grain. They got nothing in return. The SRs saw the main contradiction in the political setup under the Communists in the fact that the only productive class in the country was the peasantry; all other classes were decimated and had withered away. Yet the peasants were the class in Soviet Russia that had no political rights.³⁷ They had to silently accept the "proletarian" dictatorship and for worthless paper feed the cities which the Bolsheviks had ruined with their policies. The peasants had to pay for Bolshevik blunders, and when they refused, their villages were shelled with artillery.

Nor did the SRs believe that peasants suffered because of a proletarian dictatorship. From their point of view workers had turned into serfs of the state bureaucratic, barracks-like capitalism which the Bolsheviks somehow decided to call Communism. The Bolshevik "pseudo-class dictatorship was inevitably turning into a party dictatorship."³⁸ These definitions explain why the SR conference rejected any cooperation with the Communists. They had been and remained an enemy with whom a temporary truce was established. Clearly the wording at the June conference was much sharper than earlier. The conference resolution explained: "The rejection by the [SR] party of armed struggle against the Bolshevik dictatorship is determined by the current political situation. It cannot be interpreted as an acceptance, even a temporary one, of the Bolshevik dictatorship. It must be interpreted as a tactical decision, dictated by the current situation and by the more advantageous utilization of the party's and the people's forces."³⁹ This resolution did not exclude the possibility of resuming armed struggle against the Communists sometime in the future. For the time being, however, the SRs decided to limit their struggle against Communism to political means only. The ultimate goal was democracy and a Constituent Assembly.

Unlike the Menshevik CC, the SR party conference did not put much hope

³⁶ *Deiatyi sovet Partii i ego rezoliutsii (iiun' 1919)*, p. 5.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

on the possibility of reforming Bolshevism. The SRs were not trying to persuade Lenin to change his course or to influence "liberal" Communists. The SRs regarded Communism as unreformable: "Agreement with them is impossible without their ceasing to be what they are."⁴⁰ The SR party policy was much more uncompromising than that of the Social Democrats. In its public pronouncements, however, the PSR expressed solidarity with its old-time ally, the Social Democrats. The CC of the PSR claimed it wanted to do all it possibly could to establish the closest cooperation, "above all with the RSDWP. Joint work with that party throughout the course of the Russian revolution on the basis of consistent democratism gives hope that conditions will arise when it will be possible to put on the agenda the question of forming a united socialist party in Russia."⁴¹

The SR Central Committee proposed to the Menshevik Central Committee to set up a permanently functioning interparty informational bureau. The Social Democrats declined, thus signaling that they wanted to disassociate themselves from the explicitly anti-Communist stance of the PSR. In an internal party communication the SR Central Committee subjected the Menshevik policy to severe criticism.⁴² Of course one could only welcome Menshevik appeals to the Bolsheviks to restore free elections, to soften terror campaigns, and to democratize the Soviet regime. The problem, explained the SR Central Committee was that all these appeals and recommendations were useless. It is impossible to reason with the Communists. The SR Central Committee wrote that the Menshevik CC admitted in a letter to its local organizations that until now all negotiations with the Communists had been fruitless and that the Communists were not disposed at all to grant any concessions.⁴³ According to the SRs, in trying to convince the Communists, the Mensheviks made all kinds of ideological and tactical concessions: "This course is rather risky for their own party. Most likely, all their readiness to make concessions will lead to a situation when they will achieve no concessions from the Bolsheviks but blur the clarity of their own position, and the purity of their own views."⁴⁴ The SRs obviously meant that the Mensheviks had abandoned the commitment shared in 1918 by both parties to restore universal suffrage and the Constituent Assembly. Now the Mensheviks under Martov were willing to accept their limited Soviet franchise as a temporary limitation on democracy.

The SRs were clearly upset by Menshevik ideological concessions to the Bolsheviks. Still they recommended that the rank and file should regard the

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 5.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 23.

⁴² "Vsem Organizatsiiam PSR" (A letter of the CC to local organizations), *Biulleten' TsKa PSR* (3 December 1919), PSR Archive, folder 2004.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ "Vsem organizatsiiam PSR" (9 September 1919), Ts.P.A., Fond 274, PSR, Opis' 1, document 2.

Mensheviks with “friendly neutrality.” The path of concessions was unacceptable to the SRs, however, wrote the CC, because peasants would never accept such a policy. The Mensheviks, explained the CC, were expressing the will of urban workers, and these were in total dependency on the Bolshevik state. The workers received food rations and a myriad of “class” privileges in a hierarchical system of privilege distribution from the state. The defense of workers’ interests had put the SDs in the position of a loyal opposition rather than an irreconcilable enemy of the Communists: “The logic of their situation attunes them to reformist tactics, which can be characterized as ‘civilizing Bolshevism.’”⁴⁵ The Mensheviks’ long-term goal, according to the SRs, was to civilize the Bolsheviks, to prove to them that their utopian path was a mistake and that only a return to Social Democratic policies would lead Russia out of a dead end. The SR CC wished success to the SDs in their project but rejected it as a course of action for its own party.

At the same time the SRs were much more confident than the SDs in their own strength and in the ability of their party to triumph over the Bolsheviks in the long run. This confidence was based on their assessment of economic and political trends in the country. The facts were, they believed, that the peasantry was emerging from the civil war numerically and economically as the strongest class. It was the only class that possessed its own means of production—land, which the Communists would not be able to take away. Moreover, attempts to take away the products of the peasants’ labor had generated a powerful popular insurgency against the Communists: “It is impossible to suppress this movement by force. And if it is suppressed it will reignite with stronger force.”⁴⁶ The only way the votes of millions of peasants could be rendered meaningless was under the conditions of dictatorship. The Bolsheviks could not rule other than by dictatorship, and the peasants were not going to accept this. Therefore in the long run a resolution of the struggle between the peasants and the Communists was inevitable, and the peasants and their party would prevail.

Similarly, the SRs did not believe that the Whites could achieve their goals. To reverse the results of the Russian revolution and to take away land from peasants and restore it to former landlords would be impossible. In “Civil War and Dictatorship” Victor Chernov, the party leader, wrote that it was very difficult if not impossible for democracy to preserve state power under the conditions of a civil war. Indeed militarist and radical forces on the right and left had managed to seize power.⁴⁷ Both were minority regimes that could not have gained power in free elections: “Neither the Bolshevik dictatorship here,

⁴⁵ Ibid., “Vsem Organizatsiiam PSR,” *Biulleten’ TsKa PSR* (3 December 1919), PSR Archive, folder 2004.

⁴⁶ “Rabochie, Krestiane, Soldaty Krasnoi Armii,” underground leaflet of the PSR CC (July 1919), PSR Archive, folder 2015.

⁴⁷ Editorial, *Delo naroda*, no. 9 (29 March 1919), 1.

nor the dictatorship of Kolchak in Siberia, enjoyed the people's recognition."⁴⁸

According to this analysis the civil war between the Reds and the Whites was a war imposed on the people by two dictatorships. The protracted character of the Russian civil war, Chernov reasoned, stemmed from the fact that both the Reds and the Whites were temporary beneficiaries of popular uprisings against the other side. When peasants rebelled against the Reds, the White army poured in, and when peasants rebelled against the Whites, the Red Army broke through the front line. "The people then, will stop resorting to armed resistance only when they are able to express their will by means of free voting, and when they are able to say what kind of authority they need and what kind of system they prefer."⁴⁹ In other words rebellions were not a sign of pro-White or pro-Bolshevik attitudes but of a striving for self-rule, that is, democracy, which the Reds and the Whites exploited. "In such a war either one side or the other interchangeably enjoys victory. The victorious [side] is not the one whose army is stronger but the one whose army is less affected by desertion."⁵⁰ Both dictatorships were weak and unpopular, argued Chernov. Both held on to power not by popular consensus but by violence and terror. "Only the people themselves know what is better for them. Neither Kolchak nor Denikin nor the government of the commissars recognize this right of the people. Both want to be above the people, want to rule over the people, both are inimical to the people."⁵¹

This analysis of the nature of the civil war explains why the SRs were not willing to join the Reds against the Whites and then afterward work for a democratization of the Bolshevik regime, as Martov's Mensheviks did. The SR party conference decided that in the civil war between the Reds and the Whites, the SR party would act as a third force: "By their entire policy the Bolsheviks generate an attraction of the people to reaction. The demagogic adventurers utilize this attraction for their own ends. Only a third force can lead Russia out of this evil circle."⁵² On Red territory the SRs would wage a political struggle, and on White territory, an armed struggle, against both the Red and the White dictatorships.⁵³ The SRs were going to struggle *against* Kolchak but not *with* the Red Army. They were going to do it by themselves, and not from Soviet territory but on White-held territory from within.

As early as March 1919 Chernov prophetically predicted that the Kolchak regime would be overthrown from within, a statement that must have seemed

⁴⁸ Editorial, *Delo naroda*, no. 8 (28 March 1919), 1.

⁴⁹ "Rabochie, Krestiane, Soldaty Krasnoi Armii," underground leaflet of the PSR CC (July 1919), PSR Archive, folder 2015.

⁵⁰ Editorial, *Delo naroda*, no. 7 (27 March 1919), 1.

⁵¹ "Rabochie, Krestiane, Soldaty Krasnoi Armii," underground leaflet of the PSR CC (July 1919), PSR Archive, folder 2015.

⁵² "Rezoliutsiia Deviatogo Soveta PSR," Ts.P.A., Fond 274, PSR, Opis' 1, document 1, p. 37.

⁵³ "Deviatyi Sovet Partii Sotsialistov Revoliutsionerov," *Delo naroda*, no. 2 (n.d., underground publication, summer 1919), PSR Archive, folder 2003.

overly optimistic at the time of an impressive White offensive in the Urals toward the Volga River.⁵⁴ In internal party communications with local party organizations, the Central Committee constantly instructed local party members not to join the Reds against the Whites or the Whites against the Reds: "The party has mobilized its members for a struggle against both dictatorships, both of them ruinous for the country. A defeat, even a temporary one, of one of them must lead to a strengthening of struggle against the other."⁵⁵ In one of these letters a long-term plan of the SR party leadership was revealed. After the armed overthrow of Kolchak in Siberia, it would be possible to reopen the "front of the Constituent Assembly against the Communists."⁵⁶

The conference elaborated a party structure and organizational principles suited for its new task. In view of the Cheka attention to these matters the details were not revealed. A bureau of the Socialist Revolutionary CC in Moscow coordinated party work in Central Russia, a southern bureau in Ukraine and the North Caucasus, and another bureau in Siberia.⁵⁷ The main focus of SR activity was directed to the villages. The SRs were building "peasant brotherhoods" and trying to organize peasants under the slogan Neither for the Reds nor for the Whites!⁵⁸ The peasant movement was regarded as the most powerful weapon the party still had in its struggle against the Bolsheviks and the Whites. If properly coordinated, this insurgency could lead to the Communists' being locked in the starving cities and unable to govern the country. The SRs' exact plans remained secret. Yet the entries in the protocols of the SR Central Committee leave no doubt that the SRs were involved in the movement of the Greens. On 18 September the protocol entry read: "Heard: Information of comrade S. K. about the plan of work in the Green army."⁵⁹ The SR CC was aware of the immense difficulties they faced in leading such a movement:

We should not hide from ourselves that the popular insurgency which is likely to break out in Ukraine soon will contain in itself much that is chaotic, blind, and disorderly. There will be a tendency toward banditry, and a deviation from revolutionary order to pogroms, and a deviation from the struggle for freedom to anarchic denial of all authority and of all order. . . . we should not close our eyes to the backside of the future popular movement. . . . We are not sentimental idealizers of the people. But neither should we let ourselves be frightened by these excesses. We believe in the people as realist politicians for whom believing in the people means to

⁵⁴ Editorial, *Delo naroda*, no. 7 (27 March 1919), 1.

⁵⁵ "Ko Vsem Organizatsiiam Partii," *Listok "Dela naroda"*, no. 6, PSR Archive, folder 2003.

⁵⁶ "Thesis Adopted by the Plenum of the PSR Central Committee," an underground publication in the Nicolaevsky Collection, series 7, box 8, folder 14, p. 16.

⁵⁷ "Partiinaia Zhizn'," *Listok "Dela naroda"*, no. 6 (September 1919), PSR Archive, folder 2003.

⁵⁸ "Rezoliutsiia Deviatogo Soveta PSR," Ts.P.A., Fond 274, PSR, Opis' 1, document 1, p. 42.

⁵⁹ "Zasedanie TsKa PSR 18 sentiabria 1919 goda," Ts.P.A., Fond 274, PSR, Opis' 1, document 7.

be able to rely on the positive sides of people's character in a struggle against its negative sides.⁶⁰

The PSR created special local military commissions whose job was to coordinate SR work among peasant soldiers in the Red Army.⁶¹ Due to the secret nature of this work no details were revealed, except that the SRs tried to prevent the use of Red Army units against peasant rebels, as is clear from the following passage: "In each party organization, a military commission should work in order to maintain communication with the army units."⁶² From the SR point of view the party's task was to prevent the Communists from using the state machine to subjugate the peasants. According to a top secret Cheka report to the Communist Central Committee, the SRs and especially the Left SRs put a serious effort into organizing bands of deserters into a coherent peasant self-defense force. The deputy chairman of the Cheka's Secret Department cited from a Left SR party document: "As far as deserters are concerned, it was decided to organize them into detachments, to try to become their military leaders, and to try to restrain these detachments from overt military engagements. They were to be used primarily to render resistance to grain requisitioning in every village."⁶³ At the end of December the Cheka claimed to have discovered an SR conspiracy in Tambov Province proving the involvement of the local SRs in the armed struggle of the "Green bandits."⁶⁴

Obviously, the doctrine of the third force was hard to implement in practice. What was the party to do, for example, if a peasant rebellion against the Bolsheviks broke out in an area threatened by the Whites, as indeed happened in Tambov in the summer of 1919 when the White General K. K. Mamontov's cavalry broke through Red lines and even occupied the city for a few days?⁶⁵ Were peasant rebels supposed to stop fighting the Communists for the duration of the Whites' threat? Another apparent contradiction was between the party leaders' reasoning and the practical policy guidelines. The SRs' reasoning was that the Reds and the Whites were equally alien to democracy. Why then was armed struggle against the Whites encouraged and against the Reds prohibited? Indeed in an internal communication with local party organizations the SR Central Committee admitted that many local organizations on White-held

⁶⁰ "Vsem Organizatsiim PSR" (A letter of the CC to local organizations), *Biulleten' TsKa PSR* (3 December 1919), PSR Archive, folder 2004.

⁶¹ *Sovremennyi Moment v otsenke Partii Sotsialistov Revoliutsionerov* (February–March 1919), p. 23.

⁶² "Rezoliutsiia po tekushchemu momentu," Ts.P.A., Fond 274, PSR, Opis' 1, document 1, p. 57.

⁶³ "V Org. Biuro RKP(b) ot Sekretnogo Otdela VeCheka Zam.Zav. Sekretnogo Otdela M. Romanovsky" (17 September 1919), Ts.P.A., Fond 17, TsKa RKP(b), Opis' 84, Biuro Sekretariata, document 43.

⁶⁴ "Aresty sredi pravykh SR," *Izvestiia* (30 December 1919), 1.

⁶⁵ For an interesting description of General Mamontov's campaign, see M. I. Izergin, "Reid na Lbishchensk," *Grani*, no. 151 (1989).

territory did not want to fight against the Whites, because that would have amounted to rendering help to the Communists. The CC explained in this letter that the Ninth Conference had decided to cease armed struggle against the Reds and to intensify it against the Whites, and it urged their comrades to follow the party decisions. At the same time, however, the CC itself exhibited the same kind of reservation as the local comrades it had reprimanded. The CC decided against mobilizing of party volunteers into the Red Army during the height of Denikin's successes in the fall of 1919 precisely because it did not want to render aid to the Communists.⁶⁶ It was difficult to be consistent when anything the PSR did could have rendered assistance either to the Reds or to the Whites. Given the poor communications in 1919, and especially since the SRs concentrated on work in the villages, local SRs had to interpret party policy themselves. What hurt the consistency of policy even more was a serious internal rift over the tasks of the party in the civil war.

By the fall of 1919 there had occurred a profound realignment of political forces in what once was a united party of Socialist Revolutionaries. The Left SRs, who had been competitors and near enemies in the first half of 1918, then coalition partners of the Bolsheviks, had become de facto allies of the parent party again by the summer of 1919. Like the mainstream SRs, the Left SRs now condemned the Communist dictatorship in no uncertain terms and called for armed struggle against the Whites. The Left SRs had been subjected to vengeful and systematic persecution in 1919 at a time when the SRs were left alone due to Bolshevik tactical considerations. The positions of the Left SRs and SRs were no longer far apart. In some respects the Left SRs had become even more uncompromisingly anti-Bolshevik than the SRs.⁶⁷ The Left SRs were not opposed to armed struggle against the Communists, especially peasant armed resistance to Bolshevik detachments. In fact the SRs criticized the Left SRs for excessive readiness to resort to armed insurrections.⁶⁸

The real challenge to the SR Central Committee came this time from another group which consisted of people who had until recently been among the top leaders of the party and of the Constituent Assembly government, a group called *Narod*, or the People. The origins of this group are clearly seen in the Ufa delegation, which had negotiated a truce with the Bolsheviks in January 1919. Volsky, Burevoy, Rakitnikov, and other leaders of *Narod* defined their group as a current inside the PSR.⁶⁹ They were not interested in splitting the

⁶⁶ "Vsem Organizatsiiam PSR" (A letter of the CC to local organizations), *Biulleten' TsKa PSR* (3 December 1919), PSR Archive, folder 2004.

⁶⁷ For a discussion of interfactional struggles within the Left SR party, see *Izvestiia TsKa LSR* (26 November 1919), PSR Archive, folder 2021.

⁶⁸ "Rezoliutsii 9ogo Soveta PSR. Grazhdanskaia voina i zadachi PSR," Ts.P.A., Fond 274, PSR, Opis' 1, document 1, p. 40.

⁶⁹ K. S. Burevoi published his account of the history of the "Narod" group in his *Raspad*. See also M. N. Petrov, "The Rise and Fall of the Minority Party Socialist Revolutionaries," *Soviet Studies in History*, vol. 23, no. 2 (Fall 1984), 12-33.

party, and at the early stages of this rift, in the spring of 1919, their differences with the Central Committee were expressed in a respectful and comradely tone. Yet as time went on and the danger of the Whites to central Russia during the summer months increased, so did the impatience of the Narod leaders with the "passivity" of the party Central Committee.

At the heart of the misunderstanding between the leaders of Narod and the Moscow-based SRs were their different priorities, different experiences, and different constituencies. The Ufa delegation leaders witnessed the defeat of their party in the east due to, as they believed, an excessive willingness of the CC to cooperate with tsarist generals for the sake of the anti-Bolshevik struggle. They saw their priority as fighting against the Kolchak putschists. In order to defeat the Whites they were willing to join the Communists. The Moscow-based SRs on the other hand had the peasant constituency of central Russia in mind, and any kind of coalition with the Communists was unacceptable to them until and unless the Communists changed their policy in the countryside.⁷⁰

The Narod leaders made a number of appeals in the spring and summer of 1919 to the rank-and-file SR party members. They tried to bridge the gap between the commitments of the PSR and the reality of Soviet Russia as much as possible. The SRs were urged to recognize temporarily the necessity of a dictatorship of the soviets and were promised a "struggle" for the eventual equalization of the voting rights of workers and peasants. Soviets were portrayed as institutions that would become democratic. The PSR had to make these sacrifices, argued the Narod leaders, in view of the danger of the White counterrevolution.⁷¹ Appeals like these were perceived by the SR Central Committee as an attempt to undermine its authority and to propagate pro-Communist positions among the rank and file. Some SR leaders believed the Narod leaders were simply taking part in a Cheka operation to subvert the PSR. Indeed at this time of repressions against the PSR, in the spring and summer of 1919, Narod enjoyed a privileged status. *Izvestiia* published all their appeals.⁷² The Communists even allowed them to publish their own newspaper; they were trying to promote discord in the PSR by punishing their opponents, such as the CC, and rewarding their proponents.

The Narod group, however, were not going to play the role the Bolsheviks had assigned to them. It saw their role not in promoting the Bolshevik cause but in bridging the SR and Bolshevik positions. That is why they tried to convince not only the SRs to support Soviet power but also the Communists to change

⁷⁰ "God zhizni partii SR," *Narodovlastie*, no. 1 (1919), 55–63, 58–59.

⁷¹ "Ko Vsem Chlenam Partii Sotsialistov Revoliutsionerov ot gruppy chlenov PSR," *Izvestiia* (8 May 1919), 1.

⁷² See for example "Novyi Eserovskii Dokument," *Izvestiia* (4 September 1919), 3, and "Ob-rashchenie K Chlenam Partii Sotsialistov Revoliutsionerov ot gruppy chlenov PSR," *Izvestiia* (10 August 1919), 2.

their policies. In August 1919 the *Narod* newspaper wrote that to achieve victory over the Whites, the Bolsheviks had to win the support of the people. The Cheka terror had only led to a strengthening of "hatred among the population." The paper stated that "pumping out" grain from the countryside had generated anti-Communist peasant uprisings and that the workers were no longer supporting the Communists either.⁷³ One-party dictatorship had to be abolished; freedom of elections, the press, and the courts had to be guaranteed. The *Narod* leaders also published an "Appeal of the SR Central Committee to the Leaders of Soviet Power." By doing this they were clearly trying to exert pressure on the Communists to follow a path of reform. Their message to the Communists was: "If you really mean Soviet power and not party dictatorship, we can bring the SR party to support Soviet power." The appeal of the SRs expressed a willingness to let freely elected soviets resolve the differences between Soviet political parties: "Abandon the system of terror, abolish the party dictatorship. Schedule true elections, free from any pressure, intimidation, and manipulation. Let there be elections with complete freedom of assembly, meetings, freedom of the press and of speech."⁷⁴

It seems the SR Central Committee was convinced that the Communists would not allow such elections, and the issue of whether free soviets were better than the Constituent Assembly was taken off the SR agenda. The SR CC wanted to show to the party the meaninglessness of the *Narod* efforts. They were right. Not only were no free elections held but the *Narod* paper was closed for making such appeals. The Bolshevik bluff was called, and the *Narod's* attempt to be a go-between failed.

One would think that at this stage the *Narod* leaders might have abandoned their efforts and supported the SR Central Committee. In fact the opposite occurred. When pressed on both sides by the Communists and its own CC, *Narod* decided to split from the SR party. The group published an open letter calling on the CC to support the Red Army in view of the successful offensive of General Denikin.⁷⁵ The CC's position remained unchanged: armed struggle against Denikin, yes, but not under Communist control. *Narod* called on SR members to volunteer for the Red Army. The CC refused to mobilize party members, and it is over this issue that the split formally occurred. For violating party policy, the CC declared the *Narod* group expelled from the party.⁷⁶ As was the case with Left SRs, *Narod* activists then started campaigning inside SR

⁷³ Editorial, *Narod*, no. 1 (17 August 1919), 1.

⁷⁴ "Obrashchenie TsKa PSR," *Narod*, no. 1 (17 August 1919), 1.

⁷⁵ "Pis'mo k TsKa PSR," *Prilozhenie k Listok "Dela naroda,"* no. 6 (Fall 1919), PSR Archive, folder 2003.

⁷⁶ "Ko vsem partiinym organizatsiiam" (25 October 1919), *Prilozhenie k Listok "Dela naroda,"* no. 6; "Vsem organizatsiiam partii," *Listok "Dela naroda,"* no. 4, PSR Archive, folder 2003; and "Protokoly Zasedaniia TsKa PSR," Session of 23 October 1919, Ts.P.A., Fond 274, PSR, Opis' 1, document 7, p. 22.

party organizations against the Central Committee, which only contributed to the confusion and disorganization. Much later it became clear that the Narod group had been infiltrated by Cheka agents from the very beginning and that this split was promoted, if not engineered, by the Cheka in order to weaken the SR party.⁷⁷ In this the Communists were successful.

Nevertheless the party of Socialist Revolutionaries seems to have defined an independent role in the Russian civil war. As subsequent events have shown, the SR course of action was partly successful. Numerous peasant rebellions were led by the SRs. Peasant rebels posed a serious danger to the Bolsheviks and the Whites but were unable to prevail. The SRs did not succeed in restoring the front of the Constituent Assembly as in 1918. However, the Kolchak dictatorship was overthrown by the SR-led underground movement at the end of 1919 *before* the Red Army overran all of Siberia. Partisan peasant detachments which had been fighting the Whites continued their fight in 1920 against the Reds.

Fighting on All the Fronts

It has been suggested earlier that in the spring of 1919 the Bolshevik reform course failed largely due to popular upheavals, strikes, and uprisings which frightened the CP. We have also seen that Lenin admitted that Siberian peasants supported the Whites.⁷⁸ The question then is why, after this bitter experience, did the Bolsheviks not follow a more reasonable policy along the lines suggested by the Mensheviks and SRs? This question is particularly intriguing since Lenin continued to talk about peace with middle peasants. Nevertheless the fact is that despite the unprecedented mass desertion of peasants from the Red Army, despite numerous workers' strikes and peasant uprisings and Red Army soldiers' mutinies, no change in domestic policy was made. Private trade was still banned, while grain requisitions continued and indeed intensified.⁷⁹ Red Terror was broadened to include not only unreliable urban strata but peasants as well. Correspondence between the Communist CC and local party organizations suggests that the central party leadership was very much in control, that it initiated and supervised these policies. How then explain this contradiction between Lenin's words and deeds?

It can be argued that Lenin himself had not resolved this contradiction in his own mind. On the one hand Lenin constantly talked about attracting peasants to the side of Soviet power, since he realized that the Bolsheviks were running a risk of losing the civil war if the peasants continued to defect en masse and if peasant rebellions went on. On the other hand Lenin was adamant that private

⁷⁷ "Iz nedr bol'shevistskoi okhranki," *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 35–36 (1925), 8–10.

⁷⁸ Lenin, "O sovremennom polozhenii i blizhaishikh zadachakh Sovetskoi Vlasti" (4 July 1919), in Belov, ed., *Iz istorii Vecheka*, p. 308.

⁷⁹ Scheibert, *Lenin an der Macht*, p. 143.

trade should not be allowed and peasant "speculation" not tolerated. In one of his speeches Lenin made it clear that he was responding to the proposals of the Mensheviks and SRs and outlined what now are considered to be the ABCs of Leninism.⁸⁰

The Menshevik and SR appeals to restore democracy were nonsense, Lenin said, because there was no such thing as democracy in abstraction. One had to regard the question of democracy or dictatorship in a class context. In the capitalist West democracy was a sham, since it was a democracy of the rich and for the rich.⁸¹ Freedom was a sham because it meant freedom to exploit the working classes.⁸² "Freedom, if it contradicts the cause of liberation of labor from the oppression of capital is a lie."⁸³ In Soviet Russia there was no democracy for the bourgeoisie and those who supported them. The Soviet state could not allow itself the luxury to let its enemies engage in subversive propaganda.⁸⁴ Therefore no freedom of speech or assembly was going to be allowed under the dictatorship of the proletariat, as long as class struggle against the bourgeoisie, the class enemy, was still going on. "When only workers are left in the world and the people forget that one can be a member of society and not be a worker (this will not be soon . . .) then we will be in favor of the freedom of assembly for everyone. But now the freedom of assembly is a freedom of assembly for capitalists and counterrevolutionaries. We are struggling with them . . . and we declare that we abolish this freedom."⁸⁵

At this point Lenin did not object to the prospect of democracy for the working people *after* the "bourgeoisie" were defeated. The dictatorship was still defined as something temporary, extraordinary but necessary. However, Lenin simplified the situation somewhat. His Menshevik and SR opponents were talking not about democracy in abstraction but about Soviet democracy, freedoms ostensibly guaranteed by the Soviet Constitution. Lenin was also aware that his Cheka was suppressing not the bourgeoisie (there were no bourgeoisie left in Soviet Russia) but workers' and peasants' strikes and protests. Lenin distorted the picture to fit it into his ideological class struggle scheme, but since he and his party knew the real situation and his political opponents knew the real situation, this ideological apology for dictatorship did not sound very convincing. Responding to an SR charge on the inequality of workers and peasants, Lenin said: "When they say to us . . . 'You violated the equality of workers and peasants . . . you are criminals,' we answer: 'Yes, we have violated the equality of workers and peasants, and we affirm that you who are for this

⁸⁰ Lenin, "Rech ob obmane naroda lozungami svobody i ravenstva 19 maia [1919]," *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 38, pp. 333–73.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 350.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 351.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 346.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 349.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 350.

equality are on the side of Kolchak.' ”⁸⁶ That was because, explained Lenin, the transition to socialism had to take place under a dictatorship of the proletariat, which implied that the workers' power would be greater than that of anyone else.

Discussing the Mensheviks' and SRs' economic proposals, Lenin reiterated again and again that these proposals were nothing short of Kolchakovite schemes. A restoration of private trade would amount to a restoration of capitalism.⁸⁷ And destroying capitalism and private enterprise and private ownership was the very essence of the socialist revolution.

When the supporters of capitalism, be they representatives of bourgeois parties or Mensheviks and SRs, when they say to us: 'Abandon state monopoly, stop collecting grain by forcible methods, by fixed prices,' we answer: 'You, dear Mensheviks and SRs, you are probably well-meaning people, but you defend capitalism, you express the prejudices of the old petit bourgeois democracy, which has not seen anything but free trade and which stands aside from the intense struggle with capitalism.' . . . we are talking about a final and decisive struggle with capitalism, not allowing any conciliation.⁸⁸

Marx taught that private property was the root of all evil and it had to be destroyed. The Mensheviks and SRs were calling on the Bolsheviks to wipe out everything they had achieved. This was totally unacceptable. The place for those comrades was behind the front line with Kolchak.⁸⁹ To be specific, the Bolshevik Central Committee sent a circular to local Communists defining the party line in regard to the Mensheviks and SRs: "[send] to prison all those who help Kolchak consciously or unconsciously," but utilize some socialists for technical work under strict supervision.⁹⁰ No guidelines defined what exactly "help Kolchak unconsciously" meant. Judging by Lenin's own speeches anyone who advocated freedom of trade could be labeled an advocate of Kolchak. The problem with this circular is not only that it is arbitrary but that it made it possible to throw any critic into prison by labeling him or her a Kolchakovite.

The vigor and the power of Lenin's conviction come forth very clearly in these documents. It is as if Lenin was trying to convince himself that if what his party was doing made any sense in historical perspective, if all the sacrifices were not to be for nothing, the Communists had to stick to their goal of destroying the capitalist mode of production and all its proponents. Lenin as a

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 354.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 355.

⁸⁸ Lenin, "Rech o prodovol'stvennom i voennom polozhenii" (30 July 1919), *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 39, pp. 118–30, here p. 124.

⁸⁹ Lenin, "Plany stat'i 'O svobodnoi torgovle khlebom,'" *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 39, pp. 449–51.

⁹⁰ "Tezisy TsKa v sviazi s polozheniem vostochnogo fronta," *Perepiska Sekretariata*, vol. 7, p. 24.

theorist of Marxism was convinced, but Lenin as a pragmatist and the head of a besieged government had reservations. Lenin the Marxist was in a struggle against Lenin the statesman. There is no doubt that in 1919 Lenin was still convinced that what he called the "socialist" method of nonmarket, state collection of grain was the only acceptable one for the CP. It took another year and a half of peasant rebellions to convince Lenin to adopt a Menshevik/SR policy and to sound a retreat from what he called 'Communism' into the NEP. In the meantime the rhetoric of peace was going to be combined with the intensification of war.

At that critical moment Lenin preferred, as in the past, to rely on force. Any means were admissible to achieve victory over Kolchak and Denikin. Peasants had to be forced to fight in and supply the Red Army, and opposition parties thrown into prison. Lenin signed the infamous orders on the peasants' collective responsibility for deserters, and on his orders the Red Army shelled Russian villages identified as "nests of the Green bandits." The Lenin-Trotsky strategy of defeating Denikin was not to seek a rapprochement with peasants, workers, and opposition parties but to forcibly conscript reluctant peasants into the Red Army and mercilessly suppress any discontent. Most orders of that time ended with threats to shoot or execute: "Severe punishment for cowards and egoists. Those retreating in disorder are to be executed on the spot. Tribunals must so function that executions take place immediately after the passing of sentence. Commanders, commissars, Communists! Honest soldiers are ordered to see that traitors should not corrupt our ranks; provocateur agents and those bringing about panic must be annihilated on the spot."⁹¹ The paradox of history was that Lenin and Trotsky, who had been propelled to power two years earlier largely due to their leadership of the workers', soldiers', and peasants' popular movement, now in the fall of 1919 were busy crushing this same popular movement. They counted not on popular support for their survival but on bad weather to stop the White advances and on executions to force a peasant conscript army into battle. They hoped that the numerical superiority of the Red Army would suffice, despite desertions, to contain Denikin's offensive, until bad weather and cold exhausted the White cavalry. The order to the frontline provincial committees (Tula, Kaluga, Ryazan) explained:

The raid of [General] Mamontov, the fall of Kursk, and the continued advance of the enemy to the north poses a serious threat to the Moscow central region [Moscow and Tula] in the next month or month and a half until the autumn bad roads [*rasputitsa*] stop the movement of the enemy cavalry. The main military and political task during this month is to contain Denikin's offensive at whatever cost and to defend Tula with her plants and Moscow by whatever means available, no matter what sacrifices this

⁹¹ "Order from Trotsky," first published in *Petrogradskaia Pravda* (4 November 1919), cited here from *Memorandum on the Bolshevik or Communist Party in Russia and Its Relation to the Third or Communist International and the Russian Soviets* (a collection of documents), p. 30.

may entail. And then, when Denikin's cavalry is tied up by bad roads [*rasputitsa*] to go on a counteroffensive using our superiority in infantry.⁹²

The Bolsheviks preferred to rely exclusively on military means to achieve victory over Denikin. This reflected their general approach to politics dating back to their seizure of power by military means in October 1917. Lenin's and Trotsky's actions were perfectly consistent with Bolshevik tradition. "Liberal" Bolsheviks tended to agree privately with the Mensheviks that reforms and concessions would win over the hearts of the masses and undermine the Whites' appeal. Yet even they added that any talk of reforms had to be postponed until the final victory over the Whites.

What the moderates perhaps did not realize was that the course their party had chosen, a course of reliance on naked force, was strengthening numerically those institutions and agencies in the party-state which were created to conduct a "merciless war." It strengthened the hard-liners in the CP who displayed no reluctance or hesitation or moral restraint when applying extraordinary measures "at whatever cost." The civil war with the Greens, the civil war with the Whites, and the military and police needs of these wars, were altering the social fabric of the Communist Party. The Bolshevik press in 1919 frequently discussed bureaucratization, the party's detachment from the masses, and the rise of a privileged elite in the CP. Zinoviev complained that a wall now existed between the workers and the Communists and that workers were reluctant to enter the CP. Zinoviev revealed that many party members who were officially listed as workers in fact used to be workers; most Communists were now functionaries in all sorts of bureaucracies. Out of 15,000 Communists in Petrograd in 1918, for example, little more than 7,000 remained by 1919 due to all sorts of mobilizations for war. More than 2,000 of those few were expelled in the spring of 1919 for misdeeds, so that slightly over 5,000 Communists remained in the summer before a new membership drive. Thus in a typical Petrograd district there were no more than 200 to 300 Communists left. Zinoviev continued:

Looking through the lists of these members attentively, we became convinced that among those 200 to 300 remaining names the majority belonged to workers and employees who were permanently employed by the Soviet power apparatus. I remember I was looking through the list of names of party members who remained after the reregistration in the Petrograd District. There were two or three hundred names only. And in the paragraph "profession" one could read all the time—Soviet employee, a commissar of food supply, a commissar of such and such a regiment, a commissar of such and such a warehouse, and so on. And only very seldom could we read in this paragraph: a worker from the Geizler plant, or a worker from some other plant. We

⁹² "Tsirkuliarno Gubkomam," *Izvestiia Tska RKP(b)*, no. 6 (30 September 1919), 1.

think we will not be mistaken if we say that approximately the same is the situation in other districts of Petrograd and Moscow.⁹³

Communist Party membership in the provinces was even more thinly spread and had even less to do with the proletariat. In Kazan, for example, out of the total number of only 1,348 Communists, 337 lived in the city of Kazan and only 1,011 in the uезdy.⁹⁴ The provincial CP was largely connected with the administrative, police or military apparatus. The commanders of all those special detachments, the Cheka, the antiprofitereering detachments, the requisitioning detachments, special Internal Security troops, local cliques, and the huge bureaucracy that ran the "class rationing" system—this was the main body of the CP in 1919. All of them prospered under the conditions of civil war, both against the Whites and the Greens. Civil war gave them more autonomy from the center, more freedom of action to apply extraordinary administrative measures. In other words it gave them as individuals or gave their agencies more power and control over others.

Lenin and Trotsky's course of action tipped the balance between the hardliners and the moderates in the CP, precarious as it was in the spring of 1919, in favor of those who profited from the war—die-hard War Communists. No longer was the discussion in the CP *whether* to abolish the Cheka, but how to exterminate all enemies of Soviet power more effectively. The CP was now increasingly a war machine, a conglomeration of bureaucracies whose sole purpose of existence was to run the army, the police, the food supply, and the economy, to fight against real and imaginary "class enemies." For many decades to come, indeed until its very collapse, the CP was to define its *raison d'être* in this.

The Bolsheviks' "class" approach to politics, which tended to attribute patterns of class behavior to groups of the population depending on their occupation, property, education and other factors, combined with their military approach to politics, produced a new kind of mentality, today commonly known as Stalinist or totalitarian. This meant that entire groups of the population or even classes whose loyalty to the CP was suspect were to be treated as enemies. In an internal communication printed in the summer of 1919 the Bolshevik CC wrote: "We know the social milieu that nourishes and generates counter-revolutionary undertakings, outbursts, conspiracies, and so on. We know it very well. This milieu is bourgeois, that is, of the bourgeois intelligentsia, and in the villages of kulaks. Everywhere this is the so-called 'nonparty' public of the SRs and the Mensheviks. It is necessary to triple and to strengthen tenfold

⁹³ G. Zinoviev, "O chislennom sostave nashei partii," *Izvestiia*, no. 210 (21 September 1919), 2.

⁹⁴ "What Proportion of the Population Follows the Bolsheviks," citing *Izvestiia in Struggling Russia*, no. 16 (28 June 1919).

surveillance over this social milieu." The CC list included in the "bourgeois milieu" printers, railway workers, and an undefined "part of the urban and village population" because they supported the Mensheviks. The word "bourgeois" was used rather flexibly and applied to anyone who happened to oppose the Bolsheviks. Local Communists were called upon to be vigilant and draft lists of those belonging to hostile social milieus and send those lists to the Cheka. The duty of a Communist was to take part in systematic and wide-scale political surveillance over entire groups of the population. This task was formulated not in 1937 but in 1919. The narrow stratum of Communists who had some kind of a link to a more civilized or humane interpretation of "Communist construction" was getting progressively smaller within the Leninist CP. The instructions to the local Communists continued: "some from among the 'left' Mensheviks like to express indignation over the "barbaric," in their view, practice of taking hostages. Let them be indignant. But it is impossible to conduct a war without this. And under conditions of sharpening danger it is necessary to broaden the application of this practice and to use it by all means, more often."⁹⁵

This military and class approach to politics dictated the necessity to destroy the perceived enemy by all means available. It excluded neutrality. Either you are with us or against us. It predetermined categorical judgment and the application of terror, rationally explained and justified. The instruction quoted above asked a rhetorical question: Is it better to allow Kolchak and Denikin win or, "Is it better to capture and imprison and even execute hundreds of traitors from among the Kadets, nonparty people, and Mensheviks who take up arms against Soviet power, or agitate against mobilization, which means for Denikin, as the printers and railroad workers do?"⁹⁶ The answer to that question was deemed self-evident. The Communists made rational choices among other options, choices which had an impact on the structure of their party and on the ideology itself. It was not accidental that that party made the choices it made. A party of centralized economic bureaucracies, Cheka networks, Red Army commanders, and local cliques was not likely to welcome the idea of restoring the market, private property, private trade, and free elections. On the contrary every setback, every uprising, and every advance of Denikin this party interpreted as a signal to double its decisiveness in crushing all enemies of Soviet power. The policies it pursued formed its social structure, and its social structure strengthened the forces that shaped hard-line policies. The Bolsheviks had turned the militant Marxism of 1917 into totalitarian Stalinism by 1919, even though the term was not in use then. This transition took place in the course of the civil war.

The White tide brought new challenges to all Soviet political parties. All

⁹⁵ "Bor'ba s kontrrevoliutsiei v tylu," *Izvestiia Tska RKP(b)*, no. 4 (9 July 1919), 1.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

three parties were against the Whites. All three were losing touch with the social constituency they claimed to represent, although for different reasons. And all three went through a profound change under the impact of the civil war. The Mensheviks were in a deep ideological crisis as intraparty debate surfaced and they lost touch with their constituency because the workers were more anti-Bolshevik than they were. The Bolsheviks lost touch with the masses because they had turned from a political party into a mobilization agency for the war effort and self-preservation. Of the three, the SRs and Left SRs were closest to the aspirations of their constituency, the peasants, who truly did not want to fight for either the Reds or the Whites. But factional infighting and ideological inconsistency hampered the SRs' efforts. The SRs' attempts to lead peasant resistance were successful, but they did not portend any hope of winning over the Bolsheviks militarily.

In addition to the frontline civil war against the Whites and an unknown civil war against the Greens, the Bolsheviks were conducting yet another civil war, an invisible civil war against their political opponents, the Mensheviks and SRs. The Cheka violated the SR legalization decree in a matter of days, and it did not occur to any single Bolshevik to protest. The CP led a private war of their own party on other political parties using the instruments of state. As with everything else, they approached the task of political struggle against the socialists as a military operation. Their task was to prevent the socialists from leading popular mass movements against the Communists. Through compromise and repression, arrests, executions or other forms of intimidation, mass surveillance, and terror they succeeded in their main objective. The socialists did not or could not implement their alternative program under the conditions of war.

The Red Tide

THE VICTORY of the Communists in the civil war against the Whites is usually attributed, among other factors, to social support for the Bolsheviks. It is often argued that after some hesitation the workers and peasants took the side of the Reds. Despite setbacks, it is argued, the Bolsheviks managed to create a winning combination.¹ Other analysts have pointed to a number of military, strategic, economic, and geographical factors that contributed to the Reds' final victory regardless of social support. The Bolsheviks operated from the center of the country and had larger resources of manpower, a larger industrial base, and a dense network of railroads. They created an effective Red Army, which despite desertions, was larger than that of the Whites. In short, the Bolsheviks created a superior regime for mobilization that was able to concentrate all the resources at its disposal.²

Historians of the White movement have shown the internal weaknesses of the White regimes. The Whites had a poor civilian administration, a self-defeating agrarian policy, disruptive labor relations, and imperialist attitudes toward nationalities. All this undoubtedly contributed to their defeat.³ Yet the Bolsheviks suffered from the same kinds of problems. They too had a self-defeating agrarian policy; they too antagonized the workers, let alone the propertied classes. They too had a poor civilian administration. And yet they won. There are other factors that must be considered in order to explain the outcome of the frontline civil war. The victory of the Reds over the Whites was not necessarily the victory of a strong and popular regime over a weak and unpopular one; it could have been a victory of one weak and unpopular regime over another weak and unpopular regime.

The White offensive and victories in the spring and summer of 1919 were the result of a fortunate combination of circumstances. Diverse forces (peasants, cossacks, and workers) had turned against the Bolsheviks and cleared the way for the Whites. Whether these forces would remain neutral or turn against the Whites depended on the new administration's policies. The outcome of the frontline civil war may well have been determined by the fluctuations in alle-

¹ Moshe Lewin, "More Than One Piece Is Missing in the Puzzle," *Slavic Review*, vol. 44, no. 2 (1985) 239–50, here 243.

² Remington, *Building Socialism in Bolshevik Russia*.

³ Kenez, *Civil War in South Russia*; Lincoln, *Red Victory*; Mawdsley, *The Russian Civil War*; and Lehovich, *White against Red*.

giance of popular movements. They were against both the Reds and the Whites, but played into the hands of the Whites in the spring and into the hands of the Reds in the fall of 1919.

Collapse of the Whites in the East

In contrast to Denikin's White movement in the south, which had conquered a huge territory expanding out of a small corner in the North Caucasus, Kolchak, the supreme ruler of all Russia, had a number of advantages from the very beginning. Kolchak came to power in an area stretching from the Urals to the Pacific Ocean. He inherited the administrative apparatus of the Siberian government, which had been in existence for months. He also inherited the entire Russian gold reserve from the Komuch government. Unlike Denikin, who had to build his army as he expanded, Kolchak inherited a sizable Siberian army. At the end of spring in 1919 he controlled one of Russia's main industrial areas, the Urals, with its plants producing steel, field guns, rifles, bullets, and other war matériel. Moreover there was no shortage of food in Siberia. Nor was there a land shortage. Siberian peasants were fairly well off, and feeding the army was not as difficult as in European Russia. Landlords' holdings were negligible and limited only to the Volga basin area. Open access to the ocean made it possible to import military aid. The admiral had the political and military support of the Allies. Their missions and troops were guarding the trans-Siberian railroad and, although not involved in frontline operations, were undoubtedly an asset.

The political landscape of Siberia was also quite favorable in the beginning. As we have seen, peasants in the Urals and Volga basin welcomed Kolchak's troops and willingly served in the White army in the spring months of 1919. The Urals workers too were not hostile to the Whites in the beginning. Izhevsk and Votkinsk workers were considered most reliable in the anti-Bolshevik struggle. Moreover, Menshevik and SR organizations in Siberia were much more conservative than in European Russia. It appeared that Kolchak had a chance to forge a grand anti-Bolshevik coalition which would have been a mighty force in the frontline civil war. Nothing of the sort was done, of course. Despite all these advantages Kolchak's regime collapsed well before Denikin's and before the Red Army reached Lake Baikal in November 1919.

The Worldview of the Whites

It is logical to assume that the leaders of the White movement saw their supreme goal as a resolute struggle against Bolshevism. Yet they were not willing for the sake of this supreme goal to seek a compromise with other political forces. Bolshevism was defined broadly. As a liberal Russian historian,

Sergey Melgunov, put it: "the very notion 'Bolshevik' was so vague that one could mean anything at all by it."⁴ The Socialist Revolutionaries were certainly "Bolsheviks." Peasants who resisted the draft were also "Bolsheviks." Workers who clamored for higher wages were "Bolsheviks" as well. General M. K. Dieterichs, at one point the commander in chief, in a private conversation with another general defined the supreme goal in eradicating all leftist currents. "[It is] enough to play with the followers of Kerensky and Chernov."⁵

For Dieterichs and other commanders and government leaders, whatever their disagreements were, the supreme task was in restoring what they called order, by means of a military dictatorship. They believed that politicians, parties, and elections had wrecked Russia in 1917. Civilian politicians had ruined the Russian army in 1917 because they allowed "Bolshevik" agitators to infiltrate the army. Now the army would be above politics, and no agitators of any parties would be tolerated. Kolchak and his associates believed that all these Bolsheviks, Mensheviks, or SRs confused the workers and peasants and cleverly manipulated them in all these soviets, dumas, and zemstvos. According to G. K. Gins, the chairman of the Economic Conference under the supreme ruler, idiosyncrasies in the electoral law made it possible for the SRs to get absolute majorities in elections to the dumas and zemstvos in Siberia.⁶ The solution was not in competing with the SRs in elections based on universal suffrage but in changing the electoral law in such a way that leftist agitators would not be able to manipulate the electorate. It did not bother the leaders of the Kolchak government that in Siberia the SRs had won 75 percent of all votes in the elections to the Constituent Assembly and overwhelming majorities in local city dumas and zemstvos.⁷ Gins complained that these bodies, controlled by the SRs, had become centers of opposition to the Kolchak regime.⁸ To cope with this problem, a property qualification was introduced into the electoral law. The "leftists" were disfranchised. The local police were taken away from the control of the dumas and attached to the Ministry of Internal Affairs.⁹ Military control over elected institutions was the answer to Russia's troubles.¹⁰

The leaders of the White movement had already gotten rid of the Siberian дума, dominated by the SRs, in the period of the Directory government.¹¹ With the rise to power of the supreme ruler, not even lip service to the Constitu-

⁴ Melgunov, *Tragediia Admirala Kolchaka*, p. 76.

⁵ This conversation of Generals Dieterichs and Riabikov was reported by the British Intelligence officer: "Dva generala," *Golos minuvshogo na chuzhoi storone*, no. 1/14 (1926), 189–201.

⁶ Gins, *Sibir', Soiuzniki i Kolchak*, vol. 2, p. 26.

⁷ Collins and Smele, eds., *Kolchak and Siberia*, vol. 2 (intro. by Smele), p. xviii.

⁸ Gins, *Sibir', Soiuzniki i Kolchak*, vol. 2, p. 14.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 170.

¹¹ On the dissolution of the Siberian дума, see V. Chernov, "'Chernovskaia Gramota' i Ufimskaiia Direktoriiia" (manuscript), Nicolaevsky Collection, series 7, PSR, box 10, folder 3, pp. 1–49.

ent Assembly was tolerated. The very words—Constituent Assembly—infuriated Kolchak's officers. They associated it with the SRs, elections, accountability, and civilian control over the army—everything they detested. Admiral Kolchak expressed this profound disdain very eloquently during his interrogation upon his arrest:

The Constituent Assembly, which we have had here and which the Bolsheviks disbanded and which replaced the International here under the leadership of Chernov, generated negative attitudes on the part of the majority of people with whom I came in contact. They considered that it was artificial and partisan. This was also my opinion. I think that even though the Bolsheviks have few positive sides, the disbandment of that Constituent Assembly is truly to their credit. This, one should consider their positive asset.¹²

There could be no talk of reconvening the Constituent Assembly or convening a new one. Representative institutions had ruined Russia once already. Enough was enough. Russia needed an iron hand, a dictator.

With regard to agrarian policy, Kolchak could not bring himself to legalize the seizure of landlords' lands. Fortunately for the Whites there were no landlords' estates in Siberia. But there were in the Volga basin, right in the frontline area. Gins and others argued that it was essential to win the goodwill of peasants and do something to allay their fears.¹³ The best Kolchak's ministers could do was to promise that for the time being those who tilled the land could keep it until the question was settled later.

The worldview of the leaders of the White movement was profoundly conservative. They reckoned that peasant conscripts would do their service, barred from politics, and that would suffice to win. They believed they could win the civil war against the Red Army without the support of the dumas, or trade unions, or peasants or workers. Clearly this approach doomed the White cause from the very beginning. A regime that decided to stand above all social forces and classes would have a chance of success only if it proved that its rule was better than the chaotic multiparty democracy of 1917 or at least better than the arbitrary Bolshevik dictatorship of 1918.

What guided Kolchak's officers was not so much the desire to create an army capable of defeating the Reds but the desire to settle scores with the hated leftists. It was an instinctive gut reaction, as one historian put it.¹⁴ They were quite confident that they were superior to any kind of "worker and peasant army" led by Jews and commissars. In their opinion the best way to strengthen the front was not through compromise with the dumas or SRs but by revenge on those who had destroyed the Russia they knew before 1917. Victories at the

¹² Cited here from protocols of the interrogation in the PSR Archive, folder 2028.

¹³ Gins, *Sibir', Soiuzniki i Kolchak*, vol. 2, p. 152.

¹⁴ Collins and Smele, eds., *Kolchak and Siberia*, p. xviii.

front in March–April 1919 further convinced the Whites that Bolshevism was crumbling and that the course they had chosen was the right one. It did not occur to them that their victories were largely the result of local protests against the Bolsheviks and that the credit of popular trust they had at the beginning would not last forever.

Atamanshchina: *Warlords*

The reality of White rule was much worse than the elitist and dictatorial ideas the Whites had openly espoused. Such notions as leadership of society by the armed forces and dictatorship of the supreme ruler were no more than idealized propaganda lines. In fact the supreme ruler not only did not control the territory he claimed; he did not even control his own armed forces, even in his own capital, Omsk. According to Gins, right-wing groups carried out the same kind of underground activity as the SRs. They had their own conspiratorial organizations, their own intelligence, and their own people in government institutions.¹⁵ The supreme ruler himself was no more than a figurehead. One can argue that there was no such thing as the *Kolchak government*. Such military commanders as I. N. Krasilnikov, who had arrested the Directory during the coup d'état on 18 November 1918, systematically arrested and executed suspected leftists however they saw fit. Outside the capital, the power of the supreme ruler did not stretch beyond Irkutsk. Ataman G. S. Semenov reigned supreme in the Lake Baikal region and ignored Kolchak's envoys. Well funded by the Japanese, he relied on their troops and his bands to establish a murderous regime over the local population.¹⁶ Burning villages, extracting booty, whipping, flogging, and killing, Semenov represented the worst kind of *atamanshchina*, a free-for-all rule of local warlords. And he was not the only one. The bands of Ataman B. V. Annenkov controlled the Semipalatinsk region. Ataman I. M. Kalmykov reigned in Khabarovsk.¹⁷ In the west, Ataman A. I. Dutov of the Orenburg cossacks operated independently of the supreme ruler as well. Even within the territory of western Siberia and the Urals, which was in theory controlled by the supreme ruler of all Russia, army officers held the actual power over the lives of people in the conquered territory, regardless of Kolchak's laws and proclamations. Siberia under Kolchak was like Lebanon in the 1980s, a conglomeration of autonomous local warlords with their own armed forces, some in the pay of foreign powers and certainly independent of any government.

¹⁵ Gins, *Sibir', Soiuzniki i Kolchak*, vol. 2, p. 18.

¹⁶ Fleming, *The Fate of Admiral Kolchak*, p. 119; and Grondijs, *Le Cas-Kolchak*, p. 34.

¹⁷ Grondijs, *ibid.*, and Lincoln, *Red Victory*, pp. 256–58.

The Army and Desertion

On paper the White army in the east was a formidable force. According to some estimates it had 500,000 men. Others believe it had no more than 300,000.¹⁸ In fact, however, only a fraction of this number were at the front line. It was a large army in terms of officially registered "mouths" (*edoki*) but a small one in terms of fighters. Figures were inflated to accommodate thousands and thousands of officers sitting in all kinds of headquarters. According to a White officer, not more than 50,000 were actually at the front line during the crucial summer months.¹⁹ The numerous headquarters were centers of intrigue, rivalry, corruption, and bribes. The officers' treatment of enlisted men resurrected the worst practices of the Imperial Army. Soldiers had to regard officers as masters. Soldiers were beaten to instill fear and obedience. A Bolshevik underground leaflet in Ufa described how officers whipped the newly mobilized conscripts and then spent evenings in a restaurant, drinking and singing "God Save the Tsar."²⁰

Kolchak must have realized that such practices undermined the morale of the army, and he issued orders to stop corporal punishment. Alas, as was the case with many of his orders, these remained only on paper too. As one priest wrote in a private letter (which was intercepted by counterintelligence), an officer was told that the physical abuse of soldiers was prohibited by order of the admiral. The officer gave a revealing answer: "Let the order be the order, let Kolchak be Kolchak, and let the muzzle remain the muzzle."²¹ It seems that army officers were not concerned with creating a motivated fighting force. They believed that the best law in the army was discipline and obedience. A soldier should know his place.

It is not surprising that the Siberian army was plagued with desertion on a scale that could be compared only with that of the Red Army. According to a Menshevik witness, the morale of the enlisted men was very low, and they tried to desert at the first opportunity.²² Gins explained that Siberian peasants hardly knew what Bolshevism meant, and they had no motivation whatsoever to fight in a civil war.²³ On several occasions the newly mobilized conscripts rebelled.

¹⁸ Brinkley, *The Volunteer Army and Allied Intervention in South Russia*, p. 214. General William Graves, Commander of U.S. forces in Siberia, estimated the strength of the Kolchak army at 100,000 in August 1919. From W. Graves to Secretary of State, Records, dispatch no. 861.00.5009.

¹⁹ Filatiev, *Katastrofa belogo dvizheniia v Sibiri*, p. 79.

²⁰ "Chto Dozhdalis?" *Petrogradskaia Pravda* (4 May 1919).

²¹ Gins, *Sibir', Soiuzniki i Kolchak*, vol. 2, p. 307.

²² A report of a Menshevik who had arrived in Moscow from Siberia, "Za Sovetskim Rubezhom," *Vsegda Vpered*, no. 7 (15 February 1919).

²³ Gins, *Sibir', Soiuzniki i Kolchak*, vol. 2, p. 261.

In Tyumen their rebellion ended tragically. As local Bolsheviks reported to Moscow in March: "[The mobilization] in Tyumen has led to an uprising of several hundred conscripts. The uprising ended with their defeat and the execution of all insurgents. The mood among the conscripts is definitely revolutionary."²⁴

As a result of a similar mutiny 1,050 soldiers were executed in Tomsk.²⁵ But repressive measures failed to instill obedience. According to an SR who had left Ufa on 13 May, "Entire regiments of conscript soldiers began to go over to the side of the Soviet troops with their arms."²⁶ Indeed a British report of May 1919 stated that a Ukrainian regiment mutinied, killed its officers, and deserted to the Reds across the front line.²⁷ Defeats at the front during the summer contributed to the decomposition of the Siberian army. If soldiers deserted over the front line to the Reds, officers deserted to the rear. As General W. Graves reported to Washington: "All reports indicate that the Siberian army is completely disorganized, demoralized and in panic. There is jealousy and intrigue among commanding officers. I am reliably informed that a large number of line officers are abandoning their units and fleeing to the rear, that a great many have been shot by their men."²⁸ Menshevik, Bolshevik, and SR sources, as well as reports of foreign observers, are corroborated by the admissions of the White generals themselves. In a private conversation with General Dieterichs, General Riabikov said: "Whether our army advances or retreats, everywhere it is the same picture: thievery, robbery, and the ruin of peasants. This is what our army is doing."²⁹

Gins wrote that during his tour of the Urals in the summer he heard complaints from militiamen that military authorities had terrorized the local population so much that many militiamen could not remain at their posts. They quit and ran away.³⁰ Kolchak's army was guilty of systematic robbery, not only during its advance, but also during its retreat. Requisitions and plain robbery did not have any military or strategic value. They were yet another manifestation of revenge and senseless cruelty. According to an American cable to

²⁴ "Iz Doklada chlenov Sibirskogo TsKa, A. A. Maslennikova i M. M. Rabinovicha v TsKa RKP(b) o polozhenii v Sibiri" (21 March 1919), *Perepiska Sekretariata*, vol. 6. pp. 406–9, here p. 408.

²⁵ Espe [no first name], *God v Tsarstve Kolchaka. Materialy po istorii rabocheho dvizheniia v Sibiri (July 1918–July 1919)*, p. 8, reprinted in Collins and Smele, eds., *Kolchak and Siberia* (page indicated here is in original text and not from the pagination of Collins and Smele). Hereinafter Espe, *God v Tsarstve Kolchaka*.

²⁶ V. Bobrov, "Po Sibiri i Uralu," *Narod*, no. 1 (17 August 1919).

²⁷ Report of the British consul at Omsk to Foreign Office, cited in Fleming, *The Fate of Admiral Kolchak*, p. 139.

²⁸ From W. Graves to Secretary of State (6 August 1919), Records, dispatch 861.00.5009.

²⁹ "Dva generala," *Golos minuvshago na chuzhoi storone*, no. 1/14 (1926), 189–201, here p. 196.

³⁰ Gins, *Sibir', Soiuzniki i Kolchak*, vol. 2, p. 371.

Washington: "reliable reports indicate that the Kolchak units, freed from all restraint, are looting the districts through which they are retreating."³¹ The cossack units, above all others, were notorious for their cruelty to peasants.³² Kolchak's orders to stop the violence against the local population were of course ignored.

Peasant Resistance

Just as in European Russia under the Reds, peasants in the east under the Whites suffered from army units advancing or retreating. If in March they greeted Kolchak's troops as liberators, they very quickly discovered that their lot was no better than before. As Gins explained: "the population wanted peace. It was tired of transporting without end first the Reds and then the Whites. It was tired of permanent mobilizations. It wanted to free itself from all this."³³

The peasants wanted to be left alone. Reds or Whites appeared to them as external forces who were after recruits, horses, and food. First the army authorities would announce a mobilization, then the troops would requisition peasant property. In self-defense peasants sabotaged mobilization efforts and formed peasant bands. In response the authorities dispatched punitive detachments. The civil war on the internal front resumed. The causes of peasant resistance under the Whites were the same as under the Bolsheviks. Resistance was a protest against participation in the civil war. An SR eyewitness described this trajectory of peasant behavior in the Urals: "Temporary sympathy to the Whites was quickly extinguished by the spilled blood of peasants during pacification campaigns, requisitions, and robberies. The masses who only recently celebrated liberation [from the Bolsheviks] are now getting ready for the overthrow of the new ruler."³⁴ Gins wrote that usually after the work of punitive expeditions, "everybody, to the last man, turned into enemies of the Omsk government."³⁵ All available sources testify to the growing hostility of peasants to the Whites and the rise of a powerful partisan movement of the Greens.³⁶ The difference between peasants' relations with authorities under the Reds and the Whites was that the Bolsheviks had a much firmer grip on the countryside. They had commissars and committees of the poor, and village soviets and local "little tsars" willing to serve the Bolsheviks. The Whites had no social base of

³¹ From W. Graves to Secretary of State, Records, dispatch 861.00.5009.

³² Gins, *Sibir', Soiuzniki i Kolchak*, vol. 2, p. 191.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 212.

³⁴ V. Bobrov, "Po Sibiri i Uralu," *Narod*, no. 1 (17 August 1919).

³⁵ Gins, *Sibir', Soiuzniki i Kolchak*, vol. 2, p. 370.

³⁶ The scope of the Green movement is discussed in detail in V. Yel'tsyn, "Krestianskoe dvizhenie v Sibiri v period Kolchaka," *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia*, vol. 2, no. 49 (February 1926), 5–48.

their own in the countryside. They were perceived as guardians of the old regime.

The extent of the Green movement in Siberia was comparable to that under the Bolsheviks. In all provinces thousands and thousands of peasant rebels formed their own detachments, ambushed punitive expeditions, blew up rail tracks, and even attacked cities. According to a Bolshevik report, peasant detachments in Kansk Uezd attacked railway stations and killed railway personnel.³⁷ In the Irkutsk area the Green detachments numbered 10,000.³⁸ An SR party leader, K. S. Burevoi, wrote that in January 1919 a detachment of 3,000 Greens attacked the city of Krasnoyarsk. Peasant rebellions also flared up in Minusinsk, Kansk, Yeniseisk, and other uyezdy.³⁹ A Bolshevik report indicates that in February peasant uprisings broke out in the vicinity of Tomsk and Omsk.⁴⁰ And an SR wrote that peasant rebellions embraced huge parts of the supposedly White-held territory in Tobolsk, Tomsk, Akmolinsk, and Semipalatinsk provinces.⁴¹ In the Urals near Chelyabinsk 25,000 peasant rebels operated against the Whites.⁴² Gins simply admitted that "peasant rebellions were going on constantly."⁴³ The total number of Green rebels in Siberia, by the most conservative estimate, ran over 100,000, which was a force at least equal to if not larger than the entire Siberian White army in the field.

Robbery of the peasant population by army units was unlawful in theory. Kolchak and his army commanders did issue orders forbidding these practices. Repressive actions of punitive detachments on the other hand were undertaken in full accord with the directives of the supreme ruler, as Lieutenant General Artemyev's telegram shows: "The supreme ruler has ordered an immediate and resolute end to the Yeniseisk uprising, not excluding the use of the most severe and cruel measures, not only against the insurrectionists but against the population that lends them aid. In this respect follow the example of the Japanese in the Amur Oblast who proclaimed that any village concealing Bolsheviks would be destroyed."⁴⁴ Specifically Artemyev ordered that local authorities themselves annihilate all agitators and seditionists. For concealing Bolsheviks a fine should be imposed on the entire village, and village elders be brought to court-martial. Point seven read: "Local inhabitants should be used for reconnaissance

³⁷ "Iz Doklada chlenov Sibirskogo TsKa," in *Perepiska Sekretariata*, vol. 6, p. 406.

³⁸ This figure is drawn from the report of the punitive detachment commander, cited from Dotsenko, *The Struggle for Democracy in Siberia*, p. 93.

³⁹ Burevoi, *Kolchakovshchina*, p. 29, reprinted in Collins and Smele, eds., *Kolchak and Siberia*. Hereinafter Burevoi, *Kolchakovshchina*.

⁴⁰ "Ot chlena Sibirskogo oblastnogo komiteta RKP(b) S. N. Deriabinoi" (March 1919), *Perepiska Sekretariata*, vol. 6, pp. 420–21.

⁴¹ Rakov, *V Zastenkakh Kolchaka*. *Golos iz Sibiri*, p. 42, reprinted in Collins and Smele, eds., *Kolchak and Siberia*. Hereinafter Rakov, *V Zastenkakh Kolchaka*.

⁴² Lincoln, *Red Victory*, p. 265.

⁴³ Gins, *Sibir'*, *Soiuzniki i Kolchak*, vol. 2, p. 152.

⁴⁴ Dotsenko, *The Struggle for Democracy in Siberia*, p. 83.

and liaison. Hostages should be held. If the information thus obtained should prove to be false or is not delivered in time or if there is treachery, the hostages should be executed and the houses that belonged to them should be burned."⁴⁵ In another order Artemyev went even further. Every tenth inhabitant was to be shot if a village failed to deliver bandit leaders. And if the peasants rendered armed resistance to government troops, the entire village was to be burned, the entire male population shot, and all property confiscated.⁴⁶ The order reminded field commanders that confiscated property was to be officially registered. In other words it was not war booty for the local commanders. General S. N. Rozanov, charged with guarding the railroad in the Yeniseisk and Kansk area, also resorted to executing hostages. He declared that for every killed soldier of his detachment he would execute ten Bolsheviks held in prison in Krasnoyarsk, who would be considered hostages. Forty-nine of them were executed.⁴⁷

The effect of these measures was that peasant resistance intensified. Soldiers sent to pacify peasants deserted in increasing numbers. The government had to seek more reliable troops for these operations, and there were not many to be found. In the spring of 1919 a detachment of the notorious I. N. Krasilnikov was sent to deal with peasant rebels. It was believed that Krasilnikov's men, known for their hatred of the leftists, would be reliable enough to root out "Bolshevik" bandits. As it turned out, Krasilnikov's men were brave only when dealing with defenseless victims. In a combat situation these "reliable" fighters deserted by the dozens.⁴⁸

The Bolsheviks resorted to exactly the same measures in European Russia. They too shelled villages, took hostages, and executed "bandits." In the spring of 1919 the sequence of popular upheavals there favored the Whites. Due to the peasant anti-Bolshevik movement Kolchak had a chance to occupy the Volga basin and Kazan. He did not realize this possibility, because of his policies. The factor of the peasant movement began to work for the Reds by mid-1919. The Bolsheviks had another advantage in that they operated from the most populous part of the country. It was much easier for them to put 150,000 men on the eastern front, despite desertion, than it was for Kolchak to maintain such an army from sparsely populated Siberia. He was much more dependent on peasant goodwill than were the Bolsheviks. As long as he enjoyed it in the spring of 1919 he was able not only to hold his ground but to advance as well. When he lost the peasants' goodwill, he had no other resources he could fall back on. Greatly outnumbered at the front by the Reds, Kolchak simply could not afford to fight on the internal front against the peasants, who were, after all, the source

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Rakov, *V Zastenkakh Kolchaka*, p. 41.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

of manpower for his Siberian army. The war against the peasants had a devastating effect on the Kolchak regime.

The Workers

Workers in the Urals were caught in the shifting front line of the civil war. The Urals were overrun by the Bolsheviks at the end of 1918, then taken by Kolchak during March and lost again to the Reds in July and August. Like the peasants, the Urals workers were favorably disposed to the Whites in the beginning. This can clearly be seen in an underground Bolshevik leaflet published in Ufa under the Whites in the spring of 1919: "Have you waited long enough? You were waiting for Kolchak. Now you got what you wanted. He has come with all those orders, epaulets, and a whip. Now it makes you shudder. How many people were shot yesterday at the slaughterhouse? . . . And who was it that used to say: 'Kolchak will come and everything will be fine.' It is shameful to think, but it is true: many of our workers used to say so."⁴⁹ Many factories and plants sent greetings to the supreme ruler in the beginning.⁵⁰ Most likely they were not so much expressions of support for the Admiral as relief at the Bolsheviks' departure. According to an American observer's report: "At the end of the Bolshevik rule and for a time thereafter the majority of laborers were distinctly anti-Bolshevik."⁵¹ Indeed a peculiarity of the workers' movement in the Urals was that many of its leaders were ardent anti-Bolsheviks. Not only Izhevsk and Votkinsk workers but also workers in the Motovilikha plant and many others had a *stormy record of anti-Bolshevik struggle* in 1918. Their leaders were Mensheviks and SRs, closely associated with the SR Komuch government and the People's Army of 1918. Menshevik workers' leaders like G. Strumilo and I. Upovalov had been leaders of general strikes and uprisings against the Bolsheviks in Petrograd, Sormovo, and Izhevsk in 1918.⁵² Socialist Revolutionaries associated with the labor movement had always been on the left wing within their party. They were anti-Bolsheviks who opposed Kolchak. Right Mensheviks and SRs realized fully that if the Reds came back they would be shot, just as their comrades had been shot by the Reds in Izhevsk.⁵³ Under the

⁴⁹ "Chto Dozhdalis?" *Petrogradskaia Pravda* (4 May 1919).

⁵⁰ For the greetings of workers to Kolchak, see "The Ural Workingmen and the Omsk Government," *Struggling Russia*, no. 16 (28 June 1919). For the discussion of workers' conditions under Kolchak, see "Socialist Activities and Trade Union Movements in 1919 under A. V. Kolchak. Survey and Five Articles from Sibirskii Rabochii," Nicolaevsky Collection, series 6, box 6, folder 1.

⁵¹ "Telegram from Tomsk to Department of State. Subject: Conditions, Workingmen and Factories, Siberia, 23 February 1919," Records, dispatch 861.00.5004.12.

⁵² Upovalov, *Kak my poteriali svobodu*.

⁵³ Upon arrival in Britain, Zhandarmov and Strumilo publicly stated that they would have been shot and provided data on workers' executions by the Bolsheviks in Izhevsk. For the text of their statements: General Federation of Trade Unions, *Management Committee Meet Russian Trade Unionists* (January 1920), 2, Portuguese Archive, Strumilo folder.

political circumstances they faced, they tried to restore trade unions and safeguard workers' economic interests as best they could.

Kolchak must have realized what tremendous strategic significance the industrial base in the Urals had. To win the war against the Bolsheviks without it would be impossible. To win the workers' goodwill, Kolchak went as far as to allow a congress of workers to assemble in Ekaterinburg in June 1919. Most trade union leaders, no friends of the Bolsheviks, complained nevertheless of the arbitrary rule of the army officers. Workers were automatically suspect as semi-Bolsheviks.⁵⁴ If a trade union leader tried to explain that he was a Menshevik or an SR and had fought against the Bolsheviks, that would not impress an army officer who considered all those groups "leftist" and hence suspect. Strumilo later referred to the Kolchak regime as *komendantshchina*, a rule of army commanders.⁵⁵ The Ekaterinburg conference decided to send a delegation to Britain to establish contact with the Labour party. Officially its purpose was to inform the British about Bolshevik misrule in the Urals. The unsaid reason was to gain leverage over unruly White officers through publicity in the West. Public opinion in England was still of great significance for Kolchak, and workers wanted to use this weapon in self-defense.

According to an American observer's report on industry in the Urals, workers' conditions deteriorated slightly with the coming of the Whites. Workers had to work harder than under the Bolsheviks, and the pay was lower. Since the cost of living was constantly rising and there were no commodities on the market, workers were in a state of continued unrest and discontent. Factory owners, continued the report, "are endeavoring to oppress the workers by strong discipline." Wages were paid one or two months late in banknotes of large denominations that were impossible to change anywhere. Worst of all, "recently the owners and the military have been trying to break up workmen's unions. And meetings can be held only in the presence of the military authorities."⁵⁶ Military authorities had very little patience with workers' expressions of discontent. A case in point was a strike of printers in Tomsk. The strikers' demands were economic. Political issues were touched upon only briefly. As often happens during strikes, printers wanted to picket, in order to prevent nonunion workers from entering the premises. The officer issued an explicit warning that picketers would be shot on the spot.⁵⁷ In other places similar warnings were actually carried out. The editor of a cooperative newspaper, V. Maevskii, was shot for the seditious tone of his newspaper in Chelyabinsk.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ For the text of the resolution adopted at the Ekaterinburg congress, see *ibid.*, p. 1.

⁵⁵ For the account of the Ekaterinburg congress and this characterization of the Kolchak regime, see the manuscript "Otchet Delegatsii Prof. Soiuzov Urala, 1918-1919," Portuguese Archive, Strumilo folder.

⁵⁶ "Telegram from Tomsk to Department of State. Subject: Conditions, Workingmen and Factories, Siberia, 23 February 1919," Records, dispatch 861.00.504.12.

⁵⁷ Espe, *God v Tsarstve Kolchaka*, p. 36.

⁵⁸ Burevoi, *Kolchakovshchina*, p. 26.

In this atmosphere of reprisals workers withdrew into apoliticism and strictly economic concerns.⁵⁹ When the Reds pushed into the Urals in July 1919, workers did not rise to defend the Kolchak regime, as they had done in defense of the government of the Constituent Assembly in 1918. The Bolsheviks could exploit other industrial regions under their control, but Kolchak had only one: the Urals. When it was lost in August 1919, his cause became hopeless.

White Terror

On 22 December 1918, barely a month after Kolchak had come to power, bloody events took place in Omsk, the capital of the All-Russian government. An underground Bolshevik organization was planning an uprising to seize power in the city. Because of last-minute arrests, the Bolsheviks canceled the uprising. Nevertheless in the Kulomzino industrial district outside Omsk the uprising went ahead. It is not clear whether the Bolsheviks in Kulomzino failed to receive the message that the uprising was canceled or whether they decided to go ahead anyway.⁶⁰ One of the few things the insurgents managed to accomplish was to send a detachment to the Omsk prison, disarm the guards, and release political prisoners. Many arrested members of the Constituent Assembly, prominent SRs, were among them. Some of them found friends, colleagues, and money and managed to escape. Others had nowhere to go. On the next day the uprising ended in tragedy for those unfortunate workers who had supported the Bolshevik adventure. Hundreds of them were brutally killed.⁶¹ The city authorities issued an order for all those political prisoners who had escaped to return to prison. They would not be harmed if they returned voluntarily. If they failed to return, they would be shot on sight. A number of prominent SRs, some accompanied by their wives, voluntarily returned to prison. What followed was perhaps the most scandalous episode of White terror under Kolchak. During the night a detachment of I. N. Krasilnikov arrived in the prison and took the prisoners away. Their mutilated corpses were later found on the banks of the river Irtysh.⁶² The case was presented to the public as a criminal violation of justice by a detachment of Krasilnikov. The *London Times* wrote: "Needless to say the government was innocent of any intention to break faith and Admiral Kolchak profoundly regrets the incident."⁶³

⁵⁹ Collins and Smele, eds., *Kolchak and Siberia*, p. xxi; Smele, "Labour Conditions and the Collapse of the Siberian Economy under Kolchak, 1918–1919," *Sbornik: The Journal of the Study Group on the Russian Revolution*, no. 13 (1987), 31–59.

⁶⁰ "Iz Doklada chlenov Sibirskogo TsKa," *Perepiska Sekretariata*, vol. 6, p. 408.

⁶¹ Collins and Smele, eds., *Kolchak and Siberia*, p. xvi

⁶² Official telegrams on the murder are in Rosett, *The Rise of a New Russian Autocracy*, pp. 21–22.

⁶³ "Bolshevist Position Imperilled," *The Times* (4 January 1919), 8.

According to SR sources, however, the detachment arrived at the prison with valid documents.⁶⁴ The massacre was not just a violation of legality but murder sanctioned by the top leaders of the Kolchak regime. The bodies showed that the victims had been tortured before death. The body of Nil Fomin, one of the leaders of the Komuch government, had thirteen wounds. His executioners had tried to cut off his arms.⁶⁵ Neither was this murder an isolated incident. Indiscriminate terror against all leftists started in the very first hours of the new regime. According to a report on the coup d'état by the members of the Constituent Assembly, on 18 November 1919 assembly members held a meeting in the Palais Royal hotel in Ekaterinburg, the seat of the Congress of the Constituent Assembly. The main question on the agenda was how to react to the news that Admiral Kolchak had seized power. The report went on: "At nine in the evening, a detachment of two or three companies of the Fifth Urals Regiment, under the command of drunk officers, arrived in the hotel. . . . During the assault they threw a bomb, and they tried to kill Chernov with bayonets."⁶⁶ Chernov, the chairman of the Constituent Assembly, managed to escape thanks to the help of the Czech guards. In December 1918 Kolchak sent out a special detachment with instructions to capture Chernov, dead or alive.⁶⁷ Hundreds and thousands of SRs, Mensheviks, and Bolsheviks were seized by the officers. Some were executed on the spot. The mayor of Kansk, a Socialist Revolutionary, was hanged.⁶⁸ Many others filled the jails. Only very prominent ones, and very few of them, were released upon the insistence of foreign diplomats or under the pressure of the Czech Legion officers, who had close bonds with the SRs from the days of joint struggle against the Bolsheviks on the Volga in 1918. According to the SRs, at least 30,000 political prisoners were held in Siberian jails.⁶⁹

Under Kolchak there was no one central agency, like the Cheka under the Bolsheviks, to exercise political terror. Like everything else, terror was perpetrated by officers and military commanders. It was decentralized in the sense that military commanders acted on their own, ignoring not only civilian authorities but also their military superiors. The arbitrary murder of leftists (broadly defined) was not a violation of normal procedure but rather the essence of that regime. Melgunov described what was a typical scene on the railroad. A military patrol would check the documents of passengers. Some suspects would be arrested and led away. After that one would never find any trace of them.

⁶⁴ E. E. Kolosova, "Kak Eto Bylo? (Massovye ubiistva pri Kolchake v dekabre 1918 goda v Omske)," *Byloe*, no. 21 (1923), pp. 250–98.

⁶⁵ Rakov, *V Zastenkakh Kolchaka*, pp. 18–21.

⁶⁶ "Ot Prezidiuma S'ezda Chlenov Uchreditel'nogo Sobraniia" (19 December 1918), Ts.P.A., Fond 274, TsKa PSR, Opis' 1, document 2, p. 15.

⁶⁷ Tschernow [Chernov], *Meine Schicksalle in Sowjet Russland*, p. 12.

⁶⁸ Burevoi, *Kolchakovshchina*, p. 26.

⁶⁹ V. Bobrov, "Po Sibiri i Uralu," *Narod*, no. 1 (17 August 1919).

People simply disappeared.⁷⁰ According to some Bolshevik reports, White counterintelligence agents widely practiced torture to extract information from captured Bolsheviks or SRs about their contacts, communications, plans, and so on.⁷¹ Disappearances of leftists, death squads, and executions without trial were commonplace occurrences under Kolchak.⁷²

In addition to counterintelligence and army officers who were under the command of Kolchak, at least in theory, wide-scale terror was practiced by cossack atamans such as Semenov, B. V. Annenkov, and other warlords, who held virtually unlimited power over the population in their fiefdoms. Their reign of terror went further than disappearances of leftists. They staged full-scale massacres: 670 were shot in Ufa by cossacks; 348 were slaughtered in Chita by Semenov.⁷³ In Ekaterinburg in July an anti-Jewish pogrom claimed 2,000 casualties.⁷⁴ By their rule of terror the Whites succeeded in only one thing. They drove all social groups and all political parties into opposition. According to Gins: "the rule of military cliques, oppressive censorship, arrests, and executions, all this disappointed even the moderate democratic circles who had earlier supported Admiral Kolchak."⁷⁵ The White terror under Kolchak can be characterized as the unrestrained lawlessness of war chieftains who vented their hatred and thirst for revenge.

Political Parties

At first glance the spectrum of political opinion in Siberia consisted of the same familiar names as elsewhere in Russia: monarchists, Black Hundreds, Kadets, SRs, Mensheviks, and Bolsheviks. Yet under the impact of Kolchak's rule their political attitudes differed from groups belonging to these parties and movements elsewhere in Russia. The right wing in Siberia, that is, the officers and warlords and the admiral himself, were slightly more reactionary than Denikin and his men in the south. Kolchak and his clique behaved as if they were an All-Russian government. They acted as if they had already won the war against the Bolsheviks and the time had come to settle accounts with their political opponents.

The Kadets in Siberia too were to the right of the mainstream in their party. Partly this was because they were so weak as a party in Siberia. If in European cities the Kadets had competed well with the SRs in elections and had won majorities in some cities in 1917, in Siberia they had no chance. The SR

⁷⁰ Melgunov, *Tragediia Admirala Kolchaka*, p. 78.

⁷¹ "Iz Doklada chlenov Sibirskogo TsKa," *Perepiska Sekretariata*, vol. 6, p. 409.

⁷² "Komitet Uchreditelnogo Sobraniia i Kolchak," *Vsegda Vpered*, no. 5 (12 February 1919), 1.

⁷³ Fleming, *The Fate of Admiral Kolchak*, p. 146.

⁷⁴ Lincoln, *Red Victory*, p. 263.

⁷⁵ Gins, *Sibir', Soiuzniki i Kolchak*, vol. 2, p. 139.

majorities in the dumas and zemstvos were overwhelming. That made the Siberian Kadets favor military dictatorship. Of all the political parties in Siberia the SRs played the most important role. The SRs had won 75 percent of the Siberian vote in the elections to the Constituent Assembly. Their strength was reflected in the fact that even under Kolchak they held majorities in most city dumas and zemstvos.⁷⁶ The SRs also had an asset which no other party could match. They were the leaders of Tsentrosoiuz, a rich peasant cooperative that had substantial financial resources. Moreover, the SR leaders maintained close contact with the Czech troops, their allies of 1918. They were clearly the strongest party in the region. On the one hand it was due to the SRs' willingness to compromise that the Kolchak dictatorship had come into being in the first place. On the other hand it was largely due to the SRs' role that the Kolchak regime was overthrown before the arrival of the Reds in Irkutsk.

The tragedy of the SR party in Siberia and in the rest of Russia as well was that that party united heterogeneous groups with conflicting identities. It united true socialists and revolutionaries, like Chernov, and people who had long abandoned being revolutionaries or socialists, like N. D. Avksentiev. The SRs could never agree on a course of action. As we have seen, throughout 1919 on Bolshevik-held territory the party was torn by the struggle of the Narod group with the Central Committee over the issue of cooperation with the Bolsheviks as opposed to an independent struggle against Kolchak. On Kolchak's territory similar divisions plagued the party. Right after the coup the Komuch leaders declared Kolchak a criminal, whereas the Siberian Regional Party Committee (Kraikom) did all it could to dampen active struggle with Kolchak.⁷⁷ Chernov and the party center denounced the Right SRs for excessive willingness to cooperate with the right-wing officers during the Directory period.⁷⁸ The Right SRs N. D. Avksentiev and V. M. Zenzinov saw an agreement with the right as the only way to succeed in a struggle against the Bolsheviks.⁷⁹ They relied on the Kraikom, backed by conservative SR politicians in the dumas, zemstvos, and cooperatives.

Clearly one cannot expect unanimity in any political party while it is confronting crucial decisions during a civil war. All Russian political parties displayed a wide range of opinions and factions. However, the differences in the SR party were more profound than in the Menshevik or Bolshevik parties. The SR party was a microcosm of Russian society at large, with all its contradictions. The leaders of the SR cooperatives, or dumas or zemstvos, naturally

⁷⁶ Grondijs, *Le Cas-Koltchak*, p. 43.

⁷⁷ V. Chernov, "'Chernovskaia Gramota' i Ufimskaia Direktoriia" (manuscript), Nicolaevsky Collection, series 7, PSR, box 10, folder 3, pp. 1-49, here p. 8.

⁷⁸ V. Chernov discussed this policy in his "O taktike obvolakivaniia," *Delo naroda*, no. 4 (23 March 1919), 2.

⁷⁹ "Pis'mo Avksentieva k Eseram Iuga Rossii" (31 Oktober 1919), *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia*, no. 1 (1921), 115-21.

craved law, order, and normal market activity. From their point of view the Bolsheviks strove to destroy everything that was meaningful in their lives. Even though the Whites had attacked the dumas, altered the electoral law, and perpetrated arbitrary murders, they did not reject the principle of dumas, zemstvos, and the free market as such. This explains why initially some right-wing SRs regarded the Bolsheviks as a worse enemy than the Whites. It is indicative of their weltanschauung that the Constituent Assembly leaders who had escaped from prison trusted the word of the Omsk government that they would not be harmed if they voluntarily came back. Yet after several months of Kolchak's rule even the moderate SRs had had enough. After the bitter experience of arrests and executions they began to see the Kolchak regime as enemy number one. Political opinion within the SR party in Siberia was shifting to the left throughout 1919.

The party Central Committee had several plans to overthrow the Kolchak regime so that armed struggle against the Reds could be resumed and the Constituent Assembly reconvened.⁸⁰ In the summer of 1919 the SR Central Committee was developing a plot to overthrow Kolchak relying on partisan peasant units and backed by the friendly Czech troops. The goal was to create a multiparty democratic government in Siberia which would be able to arrest the Red Army's advance. The Mensheviks were invited to join the project. But they refused on the grounds that participation by foreign troops would discredit the undertaking. Nothing came out of this project in July. But in November, after the Red Army took Omsk and Kolchak's government was collapsing, the SR-led Political Center in Irkutsk did take power.⁸¹ It was too late, however, to organize any meaningful resistance to the Reds. Moreover political opinion within the SR party had shifted even more to the left than in July.⁸² The thought of armed struggle against the Reds had to be abandoned, and cooperation with them sought within the confines of the Soviet regime.

The inconsistencies in SR policies were not merely inconsistencies of indecisive intellectuals; rather they reflected discrepancies in popular attitudes in Siberia at large. Kolchak had benefited from goodwill in the beginning among peasants, workers, and the educated public. Not only did he fail to preserve this goodwill and build upon it; he was not even interested in trying. Kolchak and his camarilla of officers paid lip service to national tasks but in fact were interested only in revenge and settling scores with the hated leftists. They wrecked whatever chance there was of an anti-Bolshevik struggle in Siberia.

⁸⁰ "A letter of the PSR Central Committee," Nicolaevsky Collection, series 7, box 8, folder 14.

⁸¹ For discussion of the activities of the Political Center, see M. M. Konstantinov, "Poslednie Dni Kolchakovshchiny," in Collins and Smele, eds., *Kolchak and Siberia*.

⁸² For a survey of political trends in 1919 within the SD and SR parties, see G. Grekov, "Politicheskaia ideologiia v 1919 godu," *Nedel'ia*, no. 1 (1 January 1920), 4-6.

Collapse of the Whites in the South

In October 1919 even the most pessimistic of the White leaders would not have believed that three months later the war would be lost. In October one city after another was falling into the hands of Denikin's army. As soon as it entered any city, food prices tended to fall, since food supplies were plentiful. Markets reopened, military parades were held, church bells rang, solemn services were held, and thankful citizens threw flowers onto the "saviors of Russia" as their regiments marched into Kharkov, Tsaritsyn, Orel, or Kiev. The population was welcoming the Volunteer Army with great affection everywhere.

A majority of the population in the cities was Russian and Jewish, and both groups welcomed the Whites for different reasons. The educated classes, dispossessed and persecuted by the Bolsheviks, naturally looked to the Whites as "saviors and deliverers." The Russian workers, as we have seen, abandoned the Bolsheviks and in the beginning displayed friendly neutrality to the Whites. The Jews were so frightened by the endless pogroms perpetrated by various bands that they welcomed the establishment of law and order, promised by the Whites. Contrary to widespread belief, the Jewish population, mostly artisans and traders, was initially favorably disposed to Denikin.⁸³ At least some of the socialists, although skeptical of the Whites, were willing to give them the benefit of the doubt. Many Social Democrats and Socialist Revolutionaries reestablished city dumas, which had been disbanded by the Bolsheviks, and were eager now to engage in the restoration of normal life. The Whites had a tremendous advantage over the Bolsheviks in that when they entered a city they could reestablish local administration overnight. There was a large pool of intelligentsia ready to reconvene the dumas and organize the city administrations. Allied aid was coming in in great quantities: tanks, airplanes, ammunition, field hospitals, and much more.⁸⁴ Everything seemed to be just fine. It was widely believed that Tula would be taken shortly, and from there the road was open to Moscow.

There were of course a few dark clouds on the horizon. The Volunteer Army was inferior to the Reds in numbers, but it got used to fighting against superior forces, and winning. The Kolchak army in the east was now in irreversible retreat in Siberia. But the consolation was that the Red units in Siberia were so far away from the European theater of war that the Bolshevik high command could not transfer them to the south quickly. There were also some disturbing signs of discontent among the cossacks, and the "bandit" Makhno's "criminal"

⁸³ See the greeting of the Jewish communities leaders to Denikin in Heifetz, *The Slaughter of the Jews in the Ukraine in 1919*, p. 100.

⁸⁴ For data on allied military aid, see Lincoln, *Red Victory*, p. 200, and Mawdsley, *The Russian Civil War*, p. 167.

bands were a serious problem. But he was far from the front. This was the reasoning of the Whites. It was based on the assumption that a fortunate combination of circumstances would remain and negative trends would be rendered irrelevant.

A peculiarity of the civil war was that an advancing side could not afford to stop and recuperate. Denikin was under compulsion to continue the offensive. He could not afford to let the initiative pass to the Reds; this would have had an adverse effect on the morale of his troops, on Allied support, and on confidence in his leadership. His offensive could have been sustained, however, only if the cohesion of the Volunteer Army and the cossack troops had remained intact, if a well-functioning administration had quickly been established in newly occupied territories, if the railroads to the ports had functioned properly, bringing supplies to the army, and if the army itself had been replenished constantly with new recruits dedicated to the cause. Denikin's offensive was a gamble from the very beginning. He had his share of luck due to Bolshevik blunders. His continued success depended on not making too many blunders of his own. As we shall see, he made many.

State Order

Denikin vowed to convene a new Constituent Assembly after the victory over Bolshevism. It would decide the future of Russia's state order and settle the land and property question. In the meantime an advisory Special Conference of the Commander in Chief, elected by no one, promulgated laws on liberated territory, laws that were a clear throwback to pre-February 1917. This situation did not instill confidence in Denikin's commitment to electoral politics. To judge from the tone of the official press and from pronouncements of key leaders in the Special Conference and the National Center politicians who stood behind it, it was very doubtful indeed that any form of representative government was likely to be established in Russia anytime soon. Papers like *Zhizn'* wrote that in order to avoid arbitrary selection of a state order, a long period of dictatorship—a rule of “blood and iron”—was necessary.⁸⁵

Denikin's regime claimed that it stood above parties. In fact, of course, political parties played an important role. Kadet politicians were advisers to the Special Conference and to Denikin himself. They did not exactly shape Denikin's policy, but neither were they completely without an input. Some critical decisions were taken under their influence or persuasion. Denikin decided, for example, to submit to the authority of Kolchak in June 1919, largely swayed by the arguments of Petr Struve.⁸⁶ On the other hand the Kadets were nowhere

⁸⁵ “Armiia i vlast’,” *Zhizn'* (28 October [8 November] 1919), 2.

⁸⁶ Pipes, *Struve*, p. 276.

close to being a ruling party. As time went on, liberal-minded Kadets found themselves in the role of critics of the Whites rather than supporters. In any case the truly loyal press hailed the independence of the White movement from the parties. In "Army and Power," for example, the newspaper *Zhizn'* wrote: "It is the height of injustice to lay upon the army only sufferings, difficulties, and responsibilities and to deprive her representatives of a possibility to influence the process of constructing the state order of the fatherland which they are saving. . . . Faced with the incomparable heroic deeds of the army, political parties must step aside not only on paper but in real life as well."⁸⁷

The Whites never formally banned the Socialist Revolutionary party or the Social Democrats. The SDs had a more powerful influence on Denikin-held territory, and the SRs in Siberia under Kolchak. This was because the Mensheviks had their social base of support in the cities and industrial centers, and the SRs relied on the peasantry. Even though individual party members were harassed by army officers, party organizations continued to exist, assemble, publish newspapers, organize trade unions, and participate in local elections. In fact they could do more under Denikin's dictatorship in the south than under the Communist dictatorship in the north. The right-wing press argued, however, that political parties had wrecked Russia once and that salvation lay in a dictatorship of the saviours and deliverers, the White army. The newspaper *Great Russia* wrote: "Let us not be afraid of words. To let the Socialist Revolutionaries come to power means to let the gang of Bolsheviks come in through another door. This is as clear and simple as the multiplication tables."⁸⁸ Denikin himself shared these views. For him the SRs and the Mensheviks were only slightly better than the Communists. They could not be trusted, and they had to be watched closely.⁸⁹

When the Reds took a city during the civil war, their goal usually was to establish total Communist control over all spheres of life and to restructure social, economic, and political relations. When the Whites took a city, their goal was to restore the original relations. Property was returned to owners. Old names, the old calendar, and old institutions were reinstated. However, these policies unleashed a right-wing backlash of such proportions that the leaders of the White regime could no longer control or contain it. As a result, the Whites' policies in the cities pushed away the very social groups—liberals and moderate socialists—who were willing to support them.

To their chagrin, the socialists discovered that by "old institutions" the White officers meant not pre-Bolshevik but pre-February 1917 ones. Where civilian

⁸⁷ "Armiia i vlast'," *Zhizn'* (28 October [8 November] 1919), 2.

⁸⁸ Reprinted in V. Arkhangel'skii, "Stavka na sil'nykh," *Na rubezhe*, no. 1 (1919), 9.

⁸⁹ This is clear from the report of the Propaganda Department of the Special Conference on Political Parties and Organizations, "Sekretnaia svodka otdela propagandy Osobovo Soveshchaniia o politicheskikh partiakh i organizatsiakh," Ts.G.A.O.R., Fond 446, Denikin, Opis' 2, document 8.

administration was restored, it was not to the elected city dumas but to the appointed city boards (*uprava*). In many cases the governors were old-regime tsarist officials. Some of them were outspoken supporters of a resolute struggle against what they called the Bolshevik-Jewish conspiracy against Russia. V. Obolenskii, then a member of a zemstvo board and a supporter of Denikin, described the people in the local White administration: "In the localities we saw in power bureaucrats, careerists in the best case, and in the worst, malicious, vengeful, and cruel restorationists [of the old order], who settled accounts with their political opponents; or simply people corrupted by the chaotic times, that is, speculators and crooks, who strove to use their power to enrich themselves at the expense of the people or the treasury."⁹⁰ From the socialists' and liberals' point of view, the kind of people to whom the officers handed over civilian administration were reactionaries. As if to dissipate any lingering doubts as to Denikin's intentions, the Special Conference of the Commander in Chief promulgated a law on elections to the new dumas which heavily favored property owners and disfranchised broad categories of workers.⁹¹ When even that did not help, the Whites simply disbanded city dumas, as they did in Kharkov.⁹²

Denikin's regime appeared to be a right-wing military dictatorship. Yet this is inaccurate because the word *dictatorship* implies a certain degree of control, as with the Bolshevik dictatorship. The White regime did not control much. Most of Denikin's orders and the laws of the Special Conference remained on paper. If the White regime had lived according to the laws it promulgated, it would have been a step backward in comparison with the provisional government and a step forward in comparison with the dictatorship of the Communists, simply because a bad rule of law is better than no rule of law. The reality under Denikin was that army officers were above the law. No civilian was going to tell them what to do. Army officers acted increasingly as a superior caste to whom all of Russia had to be grateful.⁹³ Even well-wishers of the White regime, including its main supporters on the international arena like Struve, grew increasingly disillusioned with the progressive degeneration of the White army from an elite well-organized force into a gang of looters.⁹⁴ Many took advantage of the chaotic conditions of the civil war to enrich themselves. Corruption was pervasive. Tons and tons of ammunition, uniforms, and field hospitals never reached the front. According to Dimitry V. Lehovich, a sympathetic biographer of Denikin: "Illegally acquired merchandise—foodstuffs, salt, canned

⁹⁰ V. Obolenskii, "Krym pri Denikine," *Na chuzhoi storone*, no. 8 (1924), 5–55, here 16.

⁹¹ For the text of the electoral law, see "Pravila o proizvodstve vyborov v glasnye gorodskikh Dum," in "Denikinshchina i rabochie," *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia*, vol. 5, no. 28 (1924), 66–67.

⁹² "Razgon Khar'kovskoi Dumy," *Nachalo*, no. 1 (17 August 1919), 3.

⁹³ Miakotin, "Iz nedavnego proshlogo," *Na chuzhoi storone*, no. 9 (1925), 279–303, here 293–94.

⁹⁴ Pipes, *Struve*, p. 279

goods, liquor, clothing, linen, uniforms from Great Britain, all these were sold and resold on the black market by speculators."⁹⁵ Allied observers were appalled to see Allied matériel surface on the black market in great quantities. "Victory over Bolshevism," "Needs of the front"—these were just words from newspaper editorials. In reality the provincial officials' hatred of Bolshevism did not stop them from robbing their own defender, the White army, the only hope they had. Immediate gain was much more important than victory over Bolshevism. According to General V. Z. Mai-Maevsky, one of the key leaders of the White army, corruption was not limited only to the administration in the rear: "There is robbery on a grand scale of government property captured from the Bolsheviks and of the private belongings of the peaceful population, perpetrated by individual army men, small bands, and whole military units, who often operate with the connivance and even the approbation of their commanders."⁹⁶

The White movement as a movement of honest, patriotic, dedicated officers who had won victory after victory against superior Bolshevik forces was limited to several thousand men. As to others—rearguard officers, merchants, financiers, investors, landlords, governors, and administrators, the crowd that filled restaurants in Rostov-on-Don—they were mostly, according to V. Obolenskii, "Robbers, extortionists, insulters of dignity and honor, this scum of war fronts, this gangrene of the rear, whom the population encountered at every step. Looking at them, the population judged the Volunteer Army as a whole."⁹⁷ The White regime established by the White movement was a conglomeration of self-seeking, corrupt, ancien régime careerists and bureaucrats, motivated by personal gain, social fears, and national prejudices.

Workers

It is often maintained that if there was one social group that remained loyal to the Bolsheviks under Denikin it was the workers.⁹⁸ In the Ukrainian cities workers were a diverse group. There were Russian workers and Ukrainian, workers at small enterprises and at large plants, workers prejudiced against Jews and workers who supported Ukrainian nationalists or the Volunteer Army or the Social Democrats. In fact workers' attitudes varied from city to city and also changed over time.

According to the Social Democrats, "in the initial period, considerable groups of the proletariat in Kiev embraced the appeals of the ideologue of the Volunteer Army."⁹⁹ An SR worker wrote with regret that in the beginning of

⁹⁵ Lehovich, *White against Red*, p. 347.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 326.

⁹⁷ V. Obolenskii, "Krym pri Denikine," *Na chuzhoi storone*, no. 8 (1924), 16.

⁹⁸ Lincoln, *Red Victory*, p. 223.

⁹⁹ Kuchin-Oranskii, *Dobrovol'cheskaia zubatovshchina*, p. 12.

White rule the predominant attitude among workers was that "with this government it is possible to live."¹⁰⁰ At numerous enterprises workers sent telegrams expressing their support for the Volunteer Army: "The meeting of the workers of the trampark sends greetings to General Denikin, the leader of the people's Russian Volunteer Army, for its heroic deeds for the sake of the Russian land."¹⁰¹ A workers' delegation from the locomotive plant took part in the citywide celebration during General Denikin's entry into Kharkov.¹⁰² Several thousand workers greeted Denikin in Odessa.¹⁰³ In their numerous speeches to workers White leaders emphasized Bolshevik atrocities, promised better living conditions, and extolled patriotism and a sense of duty (Denikin himself spoke to worker audiences in Kharkov and Odessa).¹⁰⁴ In Voronezh, for example, an army officer addressed railway workers when the Reds were approaching the city with these words: "If you believe in us, if you believe in our righteous and sacred task, help us, come with us. Struggle with us not for some socialist but for our Russian motherland, for Holy Russia, for our Russian state."¹⁰⁵ The workers started shouting hurrah and joined the White battalion. Generally speaking, the patriotic appeal of the Whites was a powerful propaganda weapon. All worker pro-White organizations began with a patriotic tune but soon ended with rabid anti-Semitism. In Kiev and Odessa more workers were involved in right-wing workers' organizations than in Kharkov and Ekaterinoslav.¹⁰⁶ Kiev became the center of a pro-White, anti-Semitic workers' organization led by K. F. KIRSTA, and Kharkov was the base of the Menshevik-led Council of Southern Trade Unions.

KIRSTA's Organizational Committee was set up in early September, immediately upon the departure of the Reds. It claimed to represent twenty-six enterprises in Kiev. The Menshevik-led Provisional Bureau of Trade Unions in Kiev claimed an equal number, but the real membership figures cannot be verified. The main point of KIRSTA's ideology was Russian nationalism and militant anti-Communism. KIRSTA's paper, *Put' Rabochego*, argued that the Bolsheviks and semi-Bolsheviks (Mensheviks) had ruined Russia and that only in national and patriotic unity lay salvation. "The workers' movement in our country must be national in character. . . . we workers must openly say that we are Russian."¹⁰⁷ The paper recruited workers for the Volunteer Army. A few weeks later KIRSTA's paper turned increasingly anti-Semitic. It was not just the

¹⁰⁰ Pavel Dergachev, "V Tsarstve Belykh," *Narod*, no. 2-3 (10 March 1920), 7-10.

¹⁰¹ Kuchin-Oranskii, *Dobrovol'cheskaia zubatovshchina*, p. 14.

¹⁰² Kolesnikov, *Professional'noe dvizhenie i kontrrevoliutsiia*, p. 250.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 251.

¹⁰⁴ D. Kin, "Kirstovshchina i Men'sheviki," *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia*, no. 4 (1926), 125-57, here 135-36.

¹⁰⁵ "Voronezhskie rabochie," *Azovskii Krai*, no. 13 (20 December 1919).

¹⁰⁶ Kin, "Kirstovshchina i Men'sheviki," *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia*, no. 4 (1926), 130-33.

¹⁰⁷ Kuchin-Oranskii, *Dobrovol'cheskaia zubatovshchina*, p. 43.

Bolsheviks who had ruined Russia but the Bolsheviks and the Jews, the Internationalists, and the semi-Leninists (meaning the Social Democrats). Attacking the Menshevik Council of Southern Trade Unions, *Put' Rabochego* wrote: "These are *shiryé* Talmudists, who cannot part with their yarmulkes on their heads. They, together with the Communists, have led Russia and the Russian workers to the abyss."¹⁰⁸

Kirsta's columnists kept asking the Social Democrats what their attitude was to the Volunteer Army which had liberated Kiev from the Bolsheviks. They stressed the point that under the Whites workers could elect representatives to their own independent unions but under the Reds that was impossible. The Mensheviks found themselves on the defensive and avoided the issue altogether. They attacked the Kirsta unions for splitting the workers' movement but not for supporting the Volunteer Army. Kirsta's unions liked to present themselves as defenders of workers' needs. Even though Kirsta and the Social Democrats never missed a chance to exhibit their mutual hostility, what they wanted to do for workers was remarkably similar: both wanted to help the unemployed, restore production, and set favorable wage tariffs. All the Mensheviks could do was to offer old-fashioned trade unionism. But in this case patriotic and Russian nationalist unions backed by the authorities gave them strong competition.

The Council of Southern Trade Unions was a moderate socialist organization. Although the Menshevik Central Committee favored a resolute struggle against the White regime, including armed struggle, the union leaders had other priorities.¹⁰⁹ Most of them were old-time Social Democrats who had been involved in trade union work since 1905 or earlier. Their priority was not to lead workers to the barricades for a reunification with Soviet Russia but to defend the workers' social, economic, and political rights. They set up mutual aid funds for the unemployed and arbitration boards. They established a working relationship with entrepreneurs and opened workers' clubs focused on bargaining and compromise. The tone of most of their declarations, letters, and everyday business communications shows that their main concern was to improve the workers' plight amid unemployment, changing currencies, temporary administrations, and unpredictable shifts of the front line.

From the Bolshevik point of view they were hirelings of the bourgeoisie. The Bolsheviks later accused these SDs of collaboration with the White regime.¹¹⁰ From the Moscow Mensheviks' point of view they were not revolutionary

¹⁰⁸ Kolesnikov, *Professional'noe dvizhenie i kontrrevoliutsiia*, p. 121

¹⁰⁹ "Rezoliutsiia Tsentral'nogo komiteta RSDRP" (30 August 1919), PSR Archive, RSDRP Collection.

¹¹⁰ For the text of the Bolshevik charges and proceedings of the trial of Kiev Mensheviks in 1920, see *Partiia men'shevikov i Denikinshchina*, here pp. 11–15; "Delo Kievskikh Men'shevikov," *Izvestiia TsIK* (24 March 1920). For the Mensheviks' defense of their actions, see "Le 'Complot' de Kiev. Déclaration du Comité Central du parti mencheviste," *La République Russe* (18 October 1920), 3.

enough in their opposition to the Whites. The CC went as far as to expel the Odessa and Rostov-on-Don organizations from the party.¹¹¹ The Moscow Bolsheviks' and Mensheviks' wrath was addressed to the wrong quarters. The union leaders simply reflected the interests of their constituency. Later the SDs admitted that, after the rule of the Cheka, workers did not want to hear anything about socialism or "political struggle." At the trial of Kiev Mensheviks in 1920 the Bolshevik prosecutor asked: "Have you called upon workers to struggle with Denikin? Have you called upon the working class to help Soviet power? Answer: It was out of the question to call upon workers to struggle, because when Denikin's administration arrived our comrades, who were generally well known and respected among the workers, could have been beaten up for a call to struggle against Denikin. Workers would not listen to any of this."¹¹² It was the workers themselves, not the Mensheviks, who showed apoliticism, lack of involvement, and withdrawal into local and professional concerns and even partly into anti-Semitic nationalism.

If there was danger that a pro-White, anti-Semitic workers' movement might arise, the Whites themselves paradoxically did much to undercut it. The White leaders were always suspicious of workers as secret sympathizers with the Bolsheviks. They were reluctant to believe that Bolshevism among the workers was gone, at least for the moment. Yet they were swayed by arguments advanced mostly by the Kadets that to combat "Bolshevism," the workers' economic situation should improve. New labor laws were supposed to address the workers' social and economic needs in the hope that workers would stay away from politics.¹¹³

The Commission on Labor Legislation under the Special Conference of the Commander in Chief invited representatives of the business community and of the trade unions to take part in the preparation of the new laws. Workers' delegates were elected at the Congress of Southern Unions in early August and agreed to take part in the work of the Commission on Labor Legislation. Most of them were representatives of trade unions united in the Council of Southern Trade Unions led by the Mensheviks. The commission opened its work in Rostov-on-Don in September. The workers' delegation presented its declaration:

The Special Conference of the Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces in the South of Russia is a consultative legislative institution under military authority and therefore cannot be recognized under any circumstances as authorized to express the

¹¹¹ Volin, *Men'sheviki na Ukraine*, p. 131.

¹¹² *Partiia men'shevikov i Denikinshchina*, p. 28.

¹¹³ Guidelines of this policy are in Denikin's letter to the chairman of the Special Conference, General Dragomilov, "Pis'mo Denikina po fabrichno-zavodskomu zakonodatel'stvu na imia predsedatelia Osobovo Soveshchaniia Generala Dragomilova," Ts.G.A.O.R., Fond 439, Denikin, Opis' 1, document 41.

interests of the people. In view of this, the workers' delegation rejects in advance any responsibility for the result of work in the Commission on Labor Legislation created under the Special Conference. Having received a mandate from workers' organizations in the south of Russia to defend working-class interests in this commission against encroachments on the part of the ruling classes and state authority, the workers' delegation states that the proletariat of Russia will not abandon under any circumstances its demand for freedom of association, an eight-hour day, and for all other achievements of the February revolution.¹¹⁴

After two sentences the speaker was interrupted, and the delegation walked out in protest. The generals wanted to make one point very clear. They were willing to tolerate workers' bargaining for better wages and working conditions but not their involvement in politics. The part of the trade unions' declaration that was not allowed to be read makes clear why the generals did not want to hear it:

Under the pretext of the struggle with Bolshevism, arbitrary actions against workers' organizations, unlawful interference in their activity, arrests, and summary acts of violence against labor leaders do not stop.

In Poltava the [local chapter] presidium of the Council of [Southern] Trade Unions was arrested for discussing whether to take part in the work of the Commission on Labor Legislation. The union members were arrested and beaten up.

In Kremenchug several trade union leaders were arrested despite the fact that the Society of Factory and Plant Owners as well as other organizations vouched for them.

In Ekaterinoslav the chairman of the Factory Committee of the Bryansk plant was shot and killed for an "attempt to flee."¹¹⁵

Under the Whites, paternalistic speeches by Denikin were combined with the arbitrary rule of local commanders. A strike was immediately labeled sabotage, and the troublemakers were labeled Bolsheviks. Obolenskii recalled that Ya. A. Slashchev, the governor-general of Crimea, once told him that he had six arrested Bolsheviks with him on the train. He intended to bring them to the front line and let them go. That frequently meant being shot either by the Whites or by the Reds. Obolenskii inquired who these Bolsheviks were. Two of the names were familiar to him. They were well-known Mensheviks in Crimea. He explained to Slashchev that the arrested men were Mensheviks, not Bolsheviks, that they were very popular among the workers, and that the surest way to cause a strike was to arrest them. Slashchev agreed to release them if the trade union leaders promised in return that there would be no strikes.¹¹⁶ Slashchev, not the court, decided who was a Bolshevik and who was not, who was to be shot and who spared.

¹¹⁴ "Kommissiia po Rabochemu Zakonodatel'stvu," *Iuzhnoe slovo*, no. 18 (26 September 1919).

¹¹⁵ Cited from Pokrovskii, *Denikinshchina*, pp. 89–93.

¹¹⁶ Obolenskii, "Krym pri Denikine," *Na chuzhoi storone*, no. 8 (1924), 45–46.

Denikin's administration quickly lost credit among the workers, for the simple reason that one could not eat patriotism. The economic situation in the White-held territory declined rather than improved as time went on. The exchange of currencies hit workers badly. Rising prices and ever worsening chaos with the food supply and railways makes one wonder how anything could have worked at all. Increasingly workers went on strike. The White administration responded with antistrike laws, arrests of troublemakers ("Bolsheviks"), and arbitrary executions. The sympathetic neutrality with which workers had welcomed the Whites gave way to anxiety and later to frustration and anger.

The Countryside

The Whites inherited the social problem which had earlier bedeviled the Bolsheviks. The Ukrainian countryside was in upheaval. Partisan warfare became almost a way of life for many peasants. Their local bands had become their only guarantee against the possible arbitrariness of the central government. There had been so many of them in Ukraine: the Germans, Hetman Skoropadsky, the Ukrainian Directory, the Soviets, and now the Whites. It was not an easy task for any administration to win enough confidence from the peasants so that they ceased armed struggle and supported the new regime. The peasants' instinctive reaction to changing administrations was to hold on to their arms and see what the new authorities were up to. The Whites' social policies, however, quickly dispelled the peasants' wait-and-see attitude, and guerrilla warfare resumed, now against the Whites.

There were two factors in the record of the Whites that brought about the peasants' discontent: the agrarian legislation and the actual behavior of military commanders in the countryside. The Special Conference of the Commander in Chief promulgated a law based on the principle of inalienable private property of land. That meant that the lands seized in 1917 from the landlords had to be returned to their legitimate owners. The Constituent Assembly, which would be reconvened after the victory over Bolshevism, was going to settle the agrarian question in its final form. Such a prospect certainly did not instill much enthusiasm for the Whites among the peasants. Furthermore, they were ordered to deliver one-third of their 1919 crop to the landlords.¹¹⁷ This was a clear indication that the Whites represented the old regime and would restore the peasants' hated obligations to the landlords. According to General A. S. Lukomsky: "There were, unfortunately, . . . cases where former landlords, assisted by sympathizing officers and members of the local administration, and protected by troops, not only recovered from the peasants the agricultural

¹¹⁷ Pokrovskii, *Denikinshchina*, p. 171.

implements and cattle stolen from them, but vented their vengeance in reprisals."¹¹⁸

The White army was moving so fast that it was difficult if not impossible to organize a properly functioning supply system. In fact this was not even tried. The White command decided that the army should supply itself from the local population. As an American observer explained: "During Denikin's advance in August and September 1919 the service of supply was neglected and became so inefficient that the troops had no other resort except to live off the country. Official permission to do so quickly degenerated into licence and the troops were responsible for all kinds of excesses. Localities that welcomed them as deliverers within a month came to detest them."¹¹⁹ Even if requisitioning had been orderly and proper, with receipts and compensation later, it would have been a difficult undertaking. It was hard for peasants to part with their horses or carts for a piece of paper. Attempts to requisition food under compulsion, however, very often degenerated into plain robbery. Volunteer and cossack regiments took whatever they pleased without any account or receipt.¹²⁰ They acted like conquerors who had no bonds to the land or its people. This was the case in both the Ukrainian and the Russian provinces. Disorderly requisitions and the threat of force led to armed resistance, as the Bolsheviks had found out and as the Whites were about to. As an eyewitness described: "The advance of Denikin was at first hailed with great joy by the population, and flowers were showered on the troops in the liberated cities. The White terror, however, which followed, caused the population to change its attitude and even to go against the Whites, forming partisan detachments in the rear of Denikin's army."¹²¹

Perhaps the most notorious case of plain robbery was General K. K. Mamontov's raid into Bolshevik-held provinces, particularly in Tambov. Conceived as a military operation to disrupt the Red Army rear, the raid quickly degenerated into a self-enrichment campaign. There was an air of carnival about it. As in the Time of Troubles, it was a free-for-all now. Join the band, ride a horse, take whatever you want. Kill the enemy, life is short, enjoy it now—these were the motifs often heard. Mamontov's cavalrymen seized gold and icons and samovars and so many goods that their transport was sixty kilometers long.¹²² They

¹¹⁸ Lehovich, *White against Red*, p. 331. For a discussion of the landlords' campaign to seize their estates by force from peasants, see also "Don, Kuban', Terek," *Listok "Dela naroda,"* no. 6 (1919), PSR Archive, folder 2003.

¹¹⁹ From Rear Admiral Newton A. McCully, U.S. Navy, to Secretary of State, 19 May 1920, Records, dispatch 861.00.7082.

¹²⁰ Mawdsley, *The Russian Civil War*, p. 208.

¹²¹ This is from a report of a Latvian Red Cross official, Andreas Friedenberg, filed with the Office of the Commissioner of the U.S. for the Baltic Provinces of Russia, Riga, 14 February 1920, Records, dispatch 861.00.6630.

¹²² Lehovich, *White against Red*, p. 290.

had to abandon some of their loot because they did not have enough carts to take it along. It did not look like an army liberating the population from the Bolsheviks but rather like a large horde out to loot the peasants. At that time some uyezdy of Tambov Province had already been in rebellion against the Bolsheviks. One might have expected that they would support the Whites. Yet Mamontov's deeds and countless rapes of peasant girls had the effect only of slowing down peasant desertion from the Red Army and even brought some deserters back into the ranks.

Self-enrichment and robbery of the population on behalf of state authority was not, of course, a monopoly of the Whites. As we have seen, the Bolshevik Cheka practiced this on a grand scale as well. The difference between the two was that although much loot remained in the hands of the Cheka agents, they passed some along to the state. The riches seized from the propertied classes did contribute to sustaining the Bolshevik administration. The loot taken by Mamontov and other White commanders for the most part remained in the hands of the looters. It did not contribute to the sustenance of the White administration. The high command discouraged such practices but was powerless to prevent them. The Whites got a bad name and no tangible gains.

As a result peasant resistance to the White administration flared up in several regions. The most well-known case was that of Nestor Makhno. His band, it should be recalled, had fought against the Bolsheviks and, once they were gone, against the Whites. This band had about 15,000 rebels, a formidable force of mounted fighters, about a fifth of the entire White army strength.¹²³ Makhno's band created havoc in all of central Ukraine behind the Whites' front line. They seized entire cities: Aleksandrovsk, Mariupol, and even Ekaterinoslav. The rebels disrupted communications, railroads, and telegraph lines. They made huge parts of the supposedly White territory ungovernable. The Whites had to divert precious fighting units from the front against Makhno. Makhno's peasant bands defeated three regular regiments of the White army and took 500 soldiers and 120 officers prisoners of war.¹²⁴ The Whites had broken into central Ukraine largely due to Makhno's rebellion against the Bolsheviks. Now the roles were reversed. The Bolsheviks were the beneficiaries of Makhno's fight against the Whites.

Equally important but far less known were the Green bands of peasant rebels in the Black Sea coastal area.¹²⁵ Some of them were Russian peasants, others descendants of Ukrainian cossacks. They were as bitter about White rule as Makhno. Their strength was at least 20,000, and although deep in the rear of the White territory their military significance was enormous because Allied war matériel was coming to Novorossiysk port and had to be shipped along the only

¹²³ Kubanin, *Makhnovshchina*, p. 84.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

¹²⁵ N. Voronovich, "Mezh Dvukh ogniei," *Arkhiv Russkoi Revoliutsii*, vol. 7, pp. 53–184, here pp. 102–3. Voronovich was one of the leaders of the Greens.

railroad to Rostov, Kharkov, and the front line. The partisans frequently disrupted this rail link, causing a lot of damage.¹²⁶

In the area around Kiev and Odessa, Denikin's forces came in contact with Ukrainian national units of Simon Petliura. They too had fought against the Bolsheviks. Now they faced the Whites in an uneasy truce, which in some places exploded into open warfare. From the point of view of the Whites, Petliura's forces were at best separatists and at worst traitors to Holy Russia. The White high command fought for Russia, united and indivisible, and Ukraine in their minds was a part of Russia. They did not want to use the name Ukraine and referred to it as Small Russia. This was of course insulting to the Ukrainians. In Odessa the White and Ukrainian forces coexisted with each other somehow, but north of Kiev the Whites deployed troops badly needed against the Bolsheviks against Petliura instead.

Neither could Denikin establish a true partnership with the only ally he had—the cossacks. Their contribution to the White cause was crucial, perhaps decisive. The Kuban cossack lands had been the base of the White army since the very beginning of the armed struggle in 1918. And it was the uprising of the Don cossacks in the spring of 1919 that cleared the way for the Volunteer Army toward the Volga and central Russia. Both the Whites and the cossacks understood that they were dependent on each other. Since the cossacks were so important to the White cause, the White command kept a close watch over the political life of the cossackry and felt a need to control it. The cossack leaders resented this tutelage and constantly tried to assert their own autonomy. When the Volunteer Army was locked in cossack lands in early 1919, it was very accommodating to the cossack leaders. The more territory the White army gained, however, the more it felt itself an all-Russian army, superior to the “regional” force of the cossacks. The cossacks, on the other hand, held on ever more tenaciously to their local parliament (called the “Circle” on the Don and the Rada in Kuban), which defended their autonomy vis-à-vis the White high command. The paradox of the situation was that the greater were the successes of the Whites at the front, the greater was their pressure on the cossacks to comply with what they called “all-Russian” tasks and the weaker was their alliance.

Some politicians in the Don cossack Circle and the Kuban Rada were considering the idea of creating a Southern Russian Union, a federal structure based on equal status of representative institutions of the areas liberated from the Bolsheviks.¹²⁷ The plan was not to separate from Russia but to create a model for democratic unification of Russia after victory over the Bolsheviks. The approach underscored the fact that the Rada recognized Denikin's military authority as commander in chief but not his civilian authority over elected

¹²⁶ M. Dobranitskii, “Zelenye partizany,” *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia*, no. 8 (1924), 72–98.

¹²⁷ For discussion of the Southern Russian Union project, see a report of the local SRs to the CC, “Don, Kuban', Terek,” *Listok “Dela naroda,”* no. 6 (1919), PSR Archive, folder 2003.

regional parliaments. It postulated that the role of the army in unifying Russia was limited to combat only and that elected institutions would take charge of political affairs. This plan amounted to a direct challenge to the civilian authority of the Volunteer Army.

What had an even more devastating effect on relations between the Whites and cossacks was that the chairman of the Kuban Rada, N. S. Riabovol, was murdered by unknown officers who were never caught. Since Riabovol defended the principles of federal and republican order which the Whites were trying to curtail, the murderers of the cossack hero were perceived as defenders of the White cause. More than anything else this murder undermined the morale of the cossack units at the front.¹²⁸ Political differences between the Whites and the cossacks were well expressed in a letter to the Kuban Rada by a member of the Don Circle Assembly, P. M. Agaev. Although the Whites perceived cossack leaders who advocated republican order almost as Bolsheviks, the letter makes it very clear that the Kuban and Don cossack leaders were ardently anti-Bolshevik. The letter put it this way: "It is a fact that the cossacks . . . already for two years have carried on a hard struggle against the traitors to the motherland, with the worst enemies of the laboring Russian people—the Communists, commissars, people's commissariats, councils on economy, revolutionary committees, Chekas, and other creatures and wolves of Soviet paradise."¹²⁹ The letter argued that the cossacks had proved their dedication to the cause of saving Russia from Bolshevik despotism and expressed indignation at the labels pinned upon the cossacks by the Whites, labels calling them semi-Bolsheviks and separatists. The cossacks' so-called separatism, the letter claimed, was in fact their desire to protect their legislative assemblies from the encroachments of the Special Conference of the Commander in Chief, an institution which no one had elected or empowered to issue orders or laws to the cossacks or anybody else.

If instead of the overthrown dictatorship of the proletariat you try to establish some other kind of dictatorship, we will not submit to it, because we have risen in revolt against one dictatorship in the name of freedom for us and for the whole people and not for the sake of another dictatorship. . . . We have struggled against the violence of the Bolsheviks for the sake of freedom of our motherland. And the Constituent Assembly freely elected by all citizens we consider to be the only symbol of this freedom.¹³⁰

The letter defiantly attacked the land legislation of the Special Conference. It said the interests of the people were being sacrificed to the interests of the

¹²⁸ "O nastroenii na Kubani v sviazi s ubiistvom Riabovola," Ts.G.A.O.R., Fond 446, Denikin, Opis' 2, document 5.

¹²⁹ Pokrovskii, *Denikinschina*, p. 233.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 234.

landlord class. Agaev condemned the arbitrariness of the counterintelligence agency, which perpetrated arrests "not only of the Bolsheviks, but also and primarily of democrats, cooperative workers, and Socialist Revolutionaries."¹³¹ This explicit defense of Socialist Revolutionaries and of the Constituent Assembly is a clear indication that the center-left wing of cossack political leaders perceived moderate socialists as political allies.

One would not have expected political sympathy from the cossacks for Nestor Makhno, a former ally of the Bolsheviks. Yet Agaev's letter criticized the Whites for fighting Makhno instead of seeking political accommodation with him. Furthermore Agaev sharply attacked the antinationality policy of the White command. The Ukrainians were friends and allies of the cossacks, the letter stated. The Petliura forces fought heroically against the Bolsheviks. Yet instead of regarding them as allies, the White command opened up yet another front of the civil war, this one against the Ukrainians. Agaev reiterated ideas popular in Kuban, in favor of federative bonds with liberated areas including Ukraine and Georgia, for a common alliance of self-governing regions and republics which would serve as a basis for the unification of the whole country. The letter prophetically warned the Whites: "In the name of our true love for united and indivisible Russia, we 'separatists' are telling you: abandon your reckless play in estate privileges and caste prejudices, because otherwise you who monopolized the idea of patriotism run the risk of ruining the cossackry and losing united and great Russia forever."¹³² Agaev's letter was read aloud at the Kuban Rada Assembly and greeted with thunderous applause. It was printed in tens of thousands of copies and disseminated widely in Kuban. As an act of defiance the place of the murdered chairman of the Rada, Riabovol, was left vacant. The high command perceived this as an act of rebellion and decided to deal with the Kuban "separatists" sternly.¹³³ Twelve Rada members who had propagated "separatism" were arrested. One "separatist" was hanged. General Wrangel pressured the Kuban Rada to change its constitution. The cossack assembly complied, but the sense of being humiliated remained, and the strain between the allies intensified. Hostility to the White officers was on the rise, and cases of desertion in the cossack regiments increased.

Under the conditions of continued success at the front, the strain between the cossacks and the Whites was containable. But the first defeats exposed mutual hostility. When the Red cavalry successfully pierced the front in November, the cossacks stalled. Once out of danger of White retribution, many units withdrew from the front and began a unilateral retreat toward their homelands. They lacked neither ammunition nor horses. They abandoned positions because their confidence in White leadership had broken after the first defeats.

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 235.

¹³² Ibid., p. 236.

¹³³ General Filimonov, "Razgrom Kubanskoi Rady," *Arkhiv Russkoi Revoliutsii*, vol. 5 (1922, reprint Moscow: Terra, 1991), 322–29, here 329.

A British observer reported: "A strange paralysis crept over Kuban' Cossacks who deserted from the front in large numbers exposing their own country to attack. They were not Bolsheviks. They were simply unwilling to fight."¹³⁴ The Whites treated the cossacks as provincial separatists and showed no understanding or appreciation of their traditions and dignity. The paradox of history was that the Whites achieved their greatest successes thanks to the contribution of the cossacks, and they suffered their worst defeats in large measure because cossack dedication to the White cause was shaken.¹³⁵

Almost everywhere on the territory occupied by Denikin (Ukraine, the North Caucasus, and southern Russian provinces: Tsaritsyn, Voronezh, Kursk, and Orel) the countryside was in upheaval: the Greens along the sea-coast in the south, the grumbling Kuban and Don cossacks to the north, Makhno's rebels in the center, and Petliura's Ukrainian forces in the west. The White leaders themselves realized that they faced a hostile population. The Department of Propaganda under the Special Conference (OSVAG) reported in the fall that among those drafted in the armed forces there were "hidden Bolsheviks" who could not be trusted at the front. OSVAG proposed to deploy them in the rear for construction work.¹³⁶ State authority could sustain that hostility for a long time and even suppress it under conditions of external peace, but it could not sustain an offensive with that kind of a rear during a civil war. That is actually why, once the Whites began to retreat, there was nowhere to stop and nothing to hold on to.

The countryside under Denikin's control was extremely diverse. Various strata of peasants opposed the Whites for their own reasons, but there was no unity among them either. The main lines of conflict were between the cossacks and the Russian peasants who had settled on cossack lands. They were called *inogorodnie*, outsiders. These outsiders had actually lived on cossack lands for several generations but still were not considered cossacks and were deprived of electoral rights in the Circle or Rada assembly. The hostility between the cossacks and the outsiders was exploited by both the Bolsheviks and the Whites. The Bolsheviks recruited many outsiders to their armies, profiting from the peasants' hostility to the cossacks. The Whites and their supporters among the cossack leadership accentuated the cossacks' superiority over outsiders and thus resisted any concessions to them.

The predicament of the peasant party, the SRs, on Denikin's territory was that it was caught in the middle of social tensions that had nothing to do either

¹³⁴ "The Tragedy of Denikin," *The Times* (30 March 1920), 13.

¹³⁵ Mawdsley does not think the break with the cossacks was a major cause of defeat. See *The Russian Civil War*, p. 209. According to Lehovich, Denikin did. See *White against Red*, p. 350.

¹³⁶ "Otdel propagandy Osobogo Soveshchaniia" (9 September 1919) and "Prilozhenie k politicheskoi svodke no. 225," signed by Statskii Sovetnik Shumakher. The document was sent to Washington. See Records, dispatch 861.00.6320.

with the Whites or with the Bolsheviks. Secret correspondence of the SR Central Committee with local organizations in the cossack lands suggests that the SRs' strategy was to try to overcome the division between the cossacks and the outsiders. The SRs' premise was that both social groups did not like either the Bolsheviks or the Whites. It was in the interests of both to safeguard the autonomy and self-rule of their regions. The left wing in the Rada was working for broadening the franchise to include the outsiders as well. It was not an easy task, because cossacks cherished their privileges. Yet political trends in the Kuban Rada in the late fall of 1919 imply that some kind of settlement between the cossacks and the outsiders was possible, because the Kuban Rada passed an SR draft on land use.¹³⁷ The left-wing cossack politicians who had come to dominate the Kuban Rada in late fall were not acting on behalf of the SR Central Committee. On the other hand their speeches, decrees, and federative plans for Russia, and especially their ardent defense of the Constituent Assembly, are unmistakably in accord with the SR political platform.

Equally difficult for the SRs was the problem of Makhno's and Petliura's bands. Makhno was in open rebellion against Denikin, and Petliura's Ukrainian forces tried desperately to preserve peace with him. In a letter to local organizations the SR Central Committee wrote that since the PSR favored armed struggle against the Whites, peasant bands were their natural allies. As far as Petliura was concerned, the CC explained to local organizations that they should not be afraid of playing into the hands of Ukrainian separatists. Petliura relied on the masses of Ukrainian peasants, and therefore the SRs should not oppose him. That did not mean that they had to agree with all of Petliura's goals. The SRs could campaign for a federation of Russia with Ukraine at the future Constituent Assembly. In the meantime the slogan of the day in regard to the Petliura bands was "Go Separate Roads, but Be Together."¹³⁸ That meant that since Petliura was an opponent of the Bolsheviks and the Whites, he was an ally of the SRs.

The SRs wanted to act as a unifying force among the cossacks, the outsiders, Makhno's peasant rebels, and the Ukrainians. The secret Central Committee letters to local organizations made it clear that the SRs hoped to overcome the White dictatorship from within. Without the Whites the self-governing regions, united in a federation, would have become a magnet and a model for others to follow in overthrowing the Bolsheviks. The plan was never realized largely due to insurmountable hostility between all those forces in the countryside who opposed both the Whites and the Bolsheviks: Petliura versus Makhno, cossacks versus outsiders, and Makhno versus cossacks.

¹³⁷ "Don, Kuban', Terek," *Listok "Dela naroda,"* no. 6 (1919), PSR Archive, folder 2003.

¹³⁸ PSR CC letter to local organizations, "Vsem organizatsiiam PSR," *Biulleten' TsKa PSR* (3 December 1919), PSR Archive, folder 2004.

Terror

As soon as the Whites captured a city, a search for "Bolsheviks" would commence. In Kiev, for example, by the time the Whites came, an underground officer organization had composed a list of "Bolsheviks." One hundred fifty were seized.¹³⁹ It was enough for someone to point a finger, "He is a Bolshevik," and army officers would shoot the suspect on the spot. What is striking about the White terror is its arbitrary, chaotic, ill-conceived, and poorly organized but bloody character. In many cases White terror was a result of the free-for-all chaos prevalent in the "liberated" territory.

As the Bolsheviks labeled their political opponents White Guardists, so did the Whites label their opponents Bolsheviks. In fact often they were not Bolsheviks at all, but Mensheviks or SRs. It was simply convenient to label someone a Bolshevik in order to execute him quickly. Two Menshevik trade union leaders in Kharkov, Hofman and Babin, were thus executed.¹⁴⁰ In Kiev an SR city дума member, a Jew, was killed at point blank range. Of course no one was ever punished for this murder. No one was safe. Dozens of arbitrary executions without trial or any investigation were reported in a variety of documents.¹⁴¹ A denunciation that someone was a hidden Bolshevik was often enough for that individual to be arrested and to disappear. Field officers and especially counter-intelligence could do whatever they pleased without account to any authority.

V. Obolenskii, who served at that time as a chairman of the zemstvo board in Crimea, recalled that when the Whites took Crimea, a schoolteacher came to him complaining. She had joined the People's Socialist party and had never supported the Bolsheviks. Someone informed the counterintelligence that she was a "socialist." She was arrested, and an army officer ordered two soldiers to whip her in his presence.¹⁴² Those who had been members of local soviets at whatever level were charged with state crime. Flimsy definitions of what constituted "Bolshevism" generated all kinds of settling of accounts, denunciations, and total disregard for legal procedure. Obolenskii recalled numerous examples of people simply disappearing or being killed arbitrarily by the counterintelligence death squads. Obolenskii wrote memorandums to General Denikin on numerous occasions. Denikin responded: "Yes, I know, I know all this. But what can I do? The entire Russian people is corrupted now. And since it is corrupted, it is stealing and behaves disgracefully. We struggle against it, we do

¹³⁹ "Zhestokaia Roza," *Narodnaia gazeta*, no. 122 (28 August 1919).

¹⁴⁰ "Rasstrely Khar'kovskikh rabochikh," *Izvestiia Petrogradskogo Soveta*, no. 155 (10 July 1919), 2.

¹⁴¹ See "Pis'ma s luga," *Delo naroda*, no. 10 (30 March 1919), 3; "Don, Kuban', Terek," *Listok "Dela naroda"*, no. 6 (1919), PSR Archive, folder 2003; "Rabota Ukrainskikh Belykh," *Izvestiia Petrogradskogo Soveta*, no. 138 (23 June 1919), 1; "Razgon Khar'kovskoi Dumy," *Nachalo*, no. 1 (17 August 1919), 3.

¹⁴² Obolenskii, "Krym pri Denikine," *Na chuzhoi storone*, no. 8 (1924), 10.

all we can, but to root it out will be possible only after the end of the civil war."¹⁴³

As has often happened in Russian history, Jews were blamed for all the misfortunes that befell Russia. Food prices rose in Rostov; the Jews were to blame. The press blamed speculators, implying that the speculators were Jews, the allies of the Bolsheviks. This kind of reasoning clearly incited pogroms.¹⁴⁴ Particularly notorious in this regard was the newspaper *Kievlianin*, edited by Vitalii Shulgin in Kiev. Countless cases were reported in which army officers and soldiers were involved in arbitrary murders of Jews. An eyewitness described a scene on the railroad to Kharkov. Three soldiers entered the train and asked: "Are there any Jews?" They began searching, arrested an old man, and took him to the commandant of the station. "What are you accused of?" he asked. "That I am Jewish." The commandant let him go. But at another station the unfortunate Jew was dragged out again, while another soldier described how *he* never asked anything of the commandant but made short shrift of Jews himself.¹⁴⁵

Upon entry into a small Ukrainian town the cossacks would begin a systematic plunder of Jewish neighborhoods, accompanied by rape and murder. Usually this was done either upon taking a city from the Bolsheviks or before departure. Entire regiments of both the Volunteer Army and of cossacks staged pogroms. In some cases these scenes were described not as blind rage or revenge but as entertainment. What is most disturbing is that the local population, both in Russia and in Ukraine, on many occasions eagerly took part in the pogroms. According to a Bolshevik source, "Orel is a very narrow-minded, gray, and musty town. Even Denikin's officers were surprised by the Black Hundred-type disposition of the local inhabitants. . . . And they participated eagerly and actively in the pogrom, plundering everything in the Jewish neighborhood."¹⁴⁶ During the pogrom in Ekaterinoslav almost all Jewish shops were looted, hundreds of women raped, and hundreds murdered.¹⁴⁷ Equally bloody was the pogrom in Kiev. It was a result of the Reds' breakthrough toward Kiev in mid-October. For five days the Reds "ruled" Kiev and then were forced to retreat. The Whites returned, and a search for "collaborators" began. The "patriotic" paper *Kievlianin* started writing articles about Jews helping the Reds, and angry

¹⁴³ Ibid., p. 15.

¹⁴⁴ "Prikaz Voisku Donskomu," *Zhizn'* (26 October [8 November] 1919), PSR Archive, folder 2054.

¹⁴⁵ Pokrovskii, *Denikinshchina*, p. 108.

¹⁴⁶ "Belye v Orle," *Izvestiia*, no. 254 (13 November 1919), 3. If the Bolshevik source had pinned the blame on the White officers only, it would have fitted better with the Bolshevik propaganda line. The fact that the local population was blamed as well makes it un-Bolshevik and plausible.

¹⁴⁷ D. Zakharov, "'Natsional'naia politika' i pogromy," *Na rubezhe*, no. 4 (16 December 1919), 6-9.

White officers staged a pogrom.¹⁴⁸ Jewish neighborhoods were pillaged, women raped and killed, and even the liberal Union of Liberation, usually friendly to the Whites, sent a deputation to Denikin to protest against lawlessness.¹⁴⁹ This ordeal was repeated over and over again in dozens of Ukrainian towns. According to the Red Cross Committee, in a small town of Fastov: "The Volunteers searched all the Jewish houses. The furniture was dragged out of the houses or destroyed. Women were violated. All imaginable kinds of tortures and cruelties were perpetrated on the Jews. Even children of six weeks were slaughtered. The number of dead amounts to from 1,500 to 1,800."¹⁵⁰

Pogroms were very much a part of the free-for-all kind of anarchy prevailing in Denikin-held territory. They were results not so much of official policy as expressions of the profound anti-Semitism of certain categories of officers, cossacks, and the urban social strata. The Menshevik-led Council of Southern Trade Unions summarized the situation in its protest declaration:

A new wave of horrors, similar only to those in the Middle Ages, has rolled across the south of Russia, tormented as it has been by a two-year-long civil war. From various cities and shtetls in the former Jewish pale news is coming in about pogroms, robberies, and savage violence committed upon the defenseless Jewish population. The press is deprived of the possibility to present these facts to the public. Sinister rumors are spreading among the populace about more and more pogroms. Statistical data on pogroms are on the rise. Facts abound which stagger the human mind. An absolutely unbearable atmosphere has been created, poisoned by the evil of hatred of people, naked violence, and total impunity for the most horrible of crimes—the murder of the innocent.¹⁵¹

The council claimed that the pogroms were instigated by White officials and that none of them had been brought to justice. The wave of pogroms in the summer of 1919 was perhaps the worst Russia had experienced up to that time. According to a scrupulous, detailed, and heartbreaking study, based on interviews of survivors and extensive documentation submitted to the Allies by the All-Ukrainian Relief Committee, 120,000 deaths were recorded as a result of pogroms perpetrated by Denikin's Volunteer Army. To those victims tens of thousands must be added who suffered at the hands of cossacks and ataman bands, and even greater numbers of those raped, injured, or robbed. Hundreds of thousands, well over a million Jews, went through this agonizing experience of pogroms.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁸ A. A. Gol'denveizer, "Iz Kievskikh vospominanii," *Arkhiv Russkoi Revoliutsii*, vol. 6, pp. 161–304, here p. 269.

¹⁴⁹ Kuchin, *Dobrovol'cheskaia zubatovshchina*, pp. 90–93.

¹⁵⁰ Heifetz, *The Slaughter of the Jews*, p. 111.

¹⁵¹ "Rezoliutsiia protesta Iugprofa protiv Evreiskikh pogromov," in Kolesnikov, *Professional'noe dvizhenie i kontrrevoliutsiia*, pp. 402–3.

¹⁵² Heifetz, *The Slaughter of Jews*, pp. 180 and 182. The official name of the committee in question was the All-Ukrainian Committee for the Victims of Pogroms, under the auspices of the

As in so many other respects, Denikin's approach to social and political problems was to pretend that they did not exist. Later things would improve, was his motto. He adopted the same attitude in regard to Jewish pogroms. Many of the Jewish leaders pleaded with him to issue a strongly worded declaration denouncing the pogroms. Denikin responded that this would be misunderstood as his taking the side of the Jews. Rumors would start spreading that Denikin had "sold himself to the Jews," and in the end worse pogroms might occur.¹⁵³ Whatever the validity of this reasoning, Denikin continued to issue warnings and appeals but never fought anti-Semitism resolutely. A decent man, Denikin was a weak political leader. He failed to enforce his own moral standards on the army he led and on the administration he headed.

Agony

The speed of the collapse of the White regime in the south was truly extraordinary. When the Red cavalry broke through the front line at the end of November 1919, the retreat of the White regiments turned into a rout, an unstoppable roller coaster all the way to the ports. Kharkov fell on 12 December, Rostov-on-Don on 10 January 1920, Odessa on 9 February, and Novorossiysk in March. Within three months it was all over. A huge territory populated by over 40 million people from the Black Sea to Orel was lost. Only in Crimea the remainder of White army managed to survive for a year. In a bitter letter to General Denikin, General P. N. Wrangel, who replaced him as commander in chief, explained:

At the very time when the Volunteer armies were victoriously advancing on Moscow and your ears were listening to the sound of the bells of Moscow, in the hearts of many of your subordinate commanders alarm crept in. These armies, without training, and subsisting by robbery, afflicted with drunkenness, in which its chiefs led, and disorganized by their example, were not the armies to save Russia. Without an organized rear, without one prepared position or chain of communications, retreating through places where the population had learnt to hate it, the Volunteer army, once the retreat began, was forced to move precipitously.¹⁵⁴

The departure of one regime and the establishment of another was usually the most painful and traumatic period for a province or town in question.

International Red Cross. See also the same figures in D. Zakharov, "'Natsional'naia politika' i pogromy," *Na rubezhe*, no. 4 (16 December 1919), 6–9. Another source cites the figure of 100,000 for 1919; see Kuchin, *Dobrovol'cheskaia zubatovshchina*, p. 75.

¹⁵³ Lehovich, *White against Red*, p. 329.

¹⁵⁴ A copy of this letter, dated 18 [28] February 1920, was enclosed in a dispatch to Washington: "From Rear Admiral Newton A. McCully, U.S. Navy, to Secretary of State, 19 May 1920," Copy "A," Records, dispatch 861.00.7082.

Departing officers lost all restraint in their panic and fear and settled accounts on the spot. In Kharkov about two thousand people were executed before the Whites abandoned the city.¹⁵⁵ In Kiev five hundred were hastily executed.¹⁵⁶ A typical scene in those hectic days of December 1919 in many southern cities was bodies hanging from lampposts amid chaos at the railway stations, cluttered roads, rumors of all kinds, panic, and hopelessness. The cossack population was especially frightened by the prospect of a return of the Reds. They were going to pay dearly for their alliance with the Whites. Thousands and thousands of local residents in Don and Kuban lands took off on foot, fearing Communist reprisals. A British pilot observed from the air the flight of refugees in Kuban.

As to the sentiment generally of the cossacks with regard to the Soviets, about 100,000 of them fled from their homes when Red forces occupied the territory to Eastward of the sea of Azov. This number is quite well verified not only by reconnaissance of aviators who reported a stream of refugees sixty miles in length, women, children, cattle, pigs and whatever could be taken along, fleeing southward in the middle of March 1920. From other sources, the fact undoubtedly existed. It is the only definite fact bearing on the attitude of the populations toward the Reds, and whether they were justified or not in doing so, nevertheless this number of peasant population of the cossack territories believed themselves in such danger from the Reds that they abandoned everything they could not carry along and fled from their homes.¹⁵⁷

Vandalized cities, corpses hanging from lampposts, pogroms and terror, and tens of thousands of refugees—these were the images of the agony of the White cause.

Despite such chaos and confusion, the main ingredients of the political situation in many southern cities during the last days of the Whites were remarkably similar. State authority ceased to exist. If there was any authority at all, it passed on to organizations like the dumas or trade unions, which tried to maintain a semblance of order, disrupted as it was by the debauchery of drunken army units and by all kinds of gangs, thieves, and robbers. In Odessa, according to an American observer, a powerful organization, the Central Council of Trade Unions or "Mensheviks" as it was called, emerged as a rallying center of authority. It established contact with Allied representatives in an effort to prevent violence and assure orderly evacuation, and it appealed to the Allied authorities to prevent the execution of political prisoners by the collapsing White administration.

¹⁵⁵ Pavel Dergachev, "V Tsarstve Belykh," *Narod*, no. 2-3 (10 March 1920), 7-10.

¹⁵⁶ Kin, "Kirstovshchina i Men'sheviki," *Proletarskaia Revoliutsiia*, no. 4 (1926), 125-57, here 154.

¹⁵⁷ "Present Conditions in Don, Kuban' and Terek" (19 May 1920), Records, dispatch 861.00.7081.

The city was full of rumors that the lives of detained prisoners were in danger, that lists had been made of prisoners who were to be shot in case the authorities should leave the city, and that the intention was to take away all political prisoners who were to be punished to some other place, more convenient for this purpose. . . . The Council of Trade Unions of Odessa thinks that it is its duty to apply to the authorities to prevent the possibility of such events. Any violence toward unprotected prisoners might have very undesirable results and in case of a change in regime would provide an extra pretext to kill everyone suspected of having supported even indirectly the actual situation. In order to protect the security of all classes of the population in Odessa, the council insists that no death sentences should be carried out.¹⁵⁸

In the first days of February 1920 it became known that a Red detachment of eleven thousand was advancing toward Odessa from the direction of Nikolaev. The Volunteer Army, or what was left of it, numbered two thousand. Three-fourths of the officers retreated "without keeping contact with the advancing Reds." Even in this situation of utmost danger the White officers in Odessa did not organize any military effort to defend the city. The prevalent mood among them was apocalyptic resignation. A British officer described their feast during the plague: "Odessa was full of officers, variously estimated at tens of thousands and they appeared to be spending all their time in restaurants and cafes. Many took to drinking and carousing to such an extent that the peaceful inhabitants were as much afraid of them as they were of the Bolsheviks."¹⁵⁹ The only armed force willing and capable of defending Odessa was the Allies. But the crumbling White authority failed to do anything to assist them in their effort. According to the Allied report, six armored trains under British officers, "fully manned, gradually became functionless" because they had no coal. Gangs of thieves and bandits ransacked Jewish neighborhoods. "Shops of Jews were often broken into, usually by Volunteer army officers, and in several instances these officers were caught and shot on the spot."¹⁶⁰ In this atmosphere of chaos the local Bolsheviks rose up when the Red units were two miles from the city. Odessa was plunged into panic, from which there was no recovery. According to an American officer, a majority of the Odessa population were against the Bolsheviks and wanted only law and order, while the Volunteer Army was "poor in morale, corrupt in affairs, disloyal, unpatriotic and rotten to the core."¹⁶¹ It was every man for himself now, even at the expense of wives and

¹⁵⁸ "Obrashchenie Soveta Professional'nykh Soiuzov" (5 February 1920) was enclosed in a dispatch to Washington. See "From Rear Admiral Newton A. McCully, U.S. Navy, to Secretary of State, Subject: Odessa, Fall of, made by Lieutenant Commander Hamilton Bryan, Report on the Evacuation of Odessa (30 January–9 February 1920)," Records, dispatch 861.00.6649.

¹⁵⁹ "A Russian Exodus: The 'White' Collapse," *The Times* (20 April 1920), 13.

¹⁶⁰ "From Rear Admiral Newton A. McCully, U.S. Navy, to Secretary of State, Subject: Odessa, Fall of, made by Lieutenant Commander Hamilton Bryan, Report on the Evacuation of Odessa (30 January–9 February 1920)," Records, dispatch 861.00.6649.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

children. Thousands of people were trying to board several Allied ships to escape Bolshevik retribution. A British officer of the SS *Rio Negro* described the scene at the Odessa port in those last hours before the Bolsheviks' arrival:

I shall never forget the moment we shoved off from the wharf in Odessa. All the morning the firing in the town continued to increase, particularly machine-gun fire, and it was obvious that soon the harbour would be untenable. At 11 A.M. we were ordered by the naval authorities to leave the harbour as quickly as possible, and our Marine guard which had been lent to guard our gangways were ordered to return to their ship. This they proceeded to do at the double, and we have since heard that they *had to fight their way back*. The wharf was, of course, crowded with people who had not been able to get on board, and it was dreadful to see women standing there imploring to be taken off, even going on their knees and raising their hands in supplication.

After we had cast off and were actually moving away from the wharf a lady held up a little boy of perhaps five or six years old, and was apparently begging us to take him. I had a rope thrown on to the wharf, and she made it fast to the boy's shoulders and threw him into the sea, and we hauled him on board very frightened indeed, but otherwise no worse. And so we left Odessa; we were the last British ship to leave except, of course, the cruiser, which left immediately after us, and of the unfortunate people who were left on the quay it is reported that several hundred were massacred, the Bolsheviks deeming the fact of their being there with baggage as sufficient evidence of their being anti-revolutionaries.¹⁶²

Obviously the Allied ships could not possibly evacuate all who wanted to leave, and strict quotas were established for each ship. According to an American report:

It is estimated that not less than 12,000 women and children and 6,000 men, women, and children of the literary, scientific and professional classes who should have been evacuated, were left behind.¹⁶³

The population's fears of the Reds were justified. Hundreds of officers caught in the city were executed, even those wounded and in the hospitals.¹⁶⁴

Reports from various cities all depict the same picture of the arrival of the Reds. It was a massacre of officers, rape of "bourgeois" women, robbery of "bourgeois" neighborhoods, and settling of accounts with all those who "collaborated with the Whites." When S. M. Budennyi's cavalry took Rostov, it was allowed to plunder "bourgeois" neighborhoods for three days. As in Odessa, White officers who had stayed in the city were seized in the streets and in their

¹⁶² "Rescued from Odessa: Escaping the Red Terror," *The Times* (25 May 1920), 12.

¹⁶³ "From Rear Admiral Newton A. McCully, U.S. Navy, to Secretary of State, Subject: Odessa, Fall of, made by Lieutenant Commander Hamilton Bryan, Report on the Evacuation of Odessa (30 January–9 February 1920)," Records, dispatch 861.00.6649.

¹⁶⁴ Bechthoffer-Roberts, *In Denikin's Russia*, p. 134.

homes and executed on the spot. Wounded officers were finished off in the hospital. Some "class enemies" were burned alive. Shops were looted.¹⁶⁵ Red Army soldiers had not seen such well-stocked stores since before 1917. They discovered that workers in Rostov were paid 50 percent higher wages than in the land of the victorious proletariat. Prices for all commodities immediately rose, shops closed, and semistarvation rations were introduced, as in the rest of Russia. A few days later the Cheka established its headquarters, and a more systematic terror against "the enemies of the revolution" was launched. The chaos of the Whites was replaced by the iron rule of the Cheka for a very long time.

The Fragmentation of Society

A comparison of Denikin's and Kolchak's regimes illustrates well that even though the ruling elites of both had very little information about the activities of the other and did not consult with each other, the two White regimes were remarkably similar. There must have been certain basic political attitudes typical among the ruling elite of the White movement which manifested themselves each time they tried to "free" Russia from Bolshevism. The White regimes were not based on the support of law-abiding citizens dedicated to victory over Bolshevism but on a conglomeration of social groups out to get some advantage for themselves and only for themselves. Contrary to a widespread myth that at least the propertied classes supported the White regime, it is better to say that they supported the Whites inasmuch and insofar as it furthered their interests. An SD paper commented: "One cannot really say that the broad circles of the propertied classes actively supported the anti-Bolshevik Volunteer Army. Neither can one say that the broad masses of workers actively support the so-called 'worker and peasant' power. Both of them are only waiting. Hopes replace disillusionment and disillusionment replaces hopes."¹⁶⁶ Merchants could not have cared less about state tasks and sacrifice; they tried to jack up their prices and extract maximum profits. Factory owners tried to squeeze as much as possible out of workers to compensate for their losses under the Bolsheviks. The eight-hour day and other attributes of the revolution were thrown out the window. Now they demanded obedience or else "hidden Bolsheviks" would be dealt with accordingly. Landlords wanted their property back regardless of the impact this would produce on the morale of the peasant-soldiers. Landlords set up their own vigilante death squads to settle accounts with peasant "Bolsheviks" who had "stolen" their property.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵ Eyewitness account, "Na Donu," *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 9 (1921), 31.

¹⁶⁶ "Vtoraia Godovshchina," *Iuzhnaia gazeta* (25 October [7 November] 1919), 1.

¹⁶⁷ Obolenskii, "Krym pri Denikine," *Na chuzhoi storone*, no. 8 (1924), 47.

The Russian civil war was not only a conflict of ideologies, of organized armies fighting against each other and against their own population; it was not only a conflict of the center with the periphery, not only a class conflict, but also a war of society with itself, torn apart by conflicting identities. Who are we? was the question many social groups had a hard time finding a clear answer to. Are we cossacks, or toiling masses, or Ukrainians or Russians or Siberians? The answer to that question defined what political authority one was inclined to support—Bolshevik, Ukrainian, White, or Green. For the Don and Kuban cossacks, the answer was clear. They were cossacks first and Russians second. The Russian state cause was subordinate to their local identity and autonomy. For the peasants of central Ukraine in Makhno's bands the answer was not so clear. They defined themselves as toiling peasants and fought against the Bolsheviks, who had tried to establish control over them. But they also fought against Ukrainian nationalists and against "reactionary" Whites. Like the cossacks, they were for themselves only.

The workers were equally confused. They had once believed that they were "the toiling masses" and that the dictatorship of labor over capital was their salvation. Then they discovered that the dictatorship of labor was in practical terms a dictatorship of the Cheka. Then they encountered the White regime in the image of the old master, the whip and an army general dictating labor laws. Their response was to withdraw to their narrow class identity defended by their own trade unions. They did not care either about "national tasks" or "proletarian revolution" or Ukrainian independence. Their group identity was their only salvation and retreat.

Society under the Whites was not really a society but a conglomeration of social groups without any unifying consensus or cohesion. From this angle the White regimes come across as rather helpless victims of group egotism and of the disjointedness of Russian society. These were not dictatorships but figurehead regimes claiming to be military dictatorships. In fact they were sliding into chaos and uncontrollable anarchy. What appears to be isolated violations of law and order upon closer examination turns out to be the very nature of those regimes. All those ruthless officers, freewheeling cossacks, and corrupt officials were a part of the whole. They were the system. Neither Kolchak nor Denikin had enough power to enforce their policies. They could not prevent their troops from looting. They could not stop arbitrary murders of undesirables, nor anti-Jewish pogroms perpetrated by the troops, appointed governors, and officers, nor could they put an end to corruption and bribery in their administration. Acts of arbitrariness were the result not of centralized control and government policy but rather of the inability of central authority to enforce law and discipline. From this point of view the White regimes come across as hostages of the officer caste and as victims of social disintegration. Fragmentation into regional or local loyalties during the civil war prevented any kind of democratic unification based on consensus. Every social group was at odds with

all others. It was a society at crisis, a society at war against itself. The Bolsheviks won much more due to this fragmentation than to any kind of social support. The White armies overran territory but not the minds of citizens. They did not manage to unite the people on the basis of voluntary acceptance of their authority. Therein lay the cause of the Red tide, not in Budennyi's cavalry attack in November 1919.

Part Two _____

1920 – 1921

The End of Legal Opposition

The Mensheviks' New Platform

The collapse of Kolchak's regime and the defeat of Denikin's created an atmosphere of hope among the Mensheviks and SRs that the worst was now behind them and that finally a new chapter would begin in relations between Soviet political parties. There was no excuse anymore for extraordinary measures or emergency rule. Now, they hoped, the Soviet Constitution would be observed. Elections would be held. Optimists spoke of prospects for Soviet democracy under peacetime conditions. In fact the opposite occurred. Victories on the external front emboldened the Communists to tighten their grip over the country. And that set in motion a chain reaction of protest and repression that ended with the liquidation of the opposition parties.

The fundamental fact of life apparent to everyone in January 1920 was that the Bolshevik regime was there to stay. There was no military force that could defeat the mighty Red Army. Therefore one had to seek some kind of accommodation with the Bolshevik regime. This was the mainstream political opinion in the Menshevik and SR parties. The question to be resolved was how far, not whether, to go in this direction. In April 1920 the Menshevik CC took another step toward recognizing the legitimacy of the Soviet order. This found expression in a report drafted by Martov to the Menshevik party conference: "World Social Revolution and the Tasks of Social Democracy."¹ This document reduced the differences on matters of constitutional order between the Communists and the Social Democrats to a minimum. The October seizure of power was referred to as the October revolution, which was described as historically necessary. The dictatorship of the proletariat was recognized as justifiable, and the goal of socialist construction was praised in principle.

What is remarkable about this document is its abstract nature. There was little in it on day-to-day politics. It comes across as an imaginary debate between Martov and Lenin on issues that preoccupied them all their lives: the nature of the dictatorship of the proletariat, socialism, and democracy. Martov went out of his way to establish common ground with Lenin. The report agreed with the Bolsheviks that the world had entered the epoch of the collapse of capitalism and the triumph of socialism. But Martov added that this would be a

¹ The full text is in "Rezoliutsii Soveshchaniia pri TsKa RSDRP," Ts.P.A., Fond 275, TsKa RSDRP, Opis' 1, document 70.

lengthy historical epoch and that true Marxists could not attempt to skip stages in historical development. In Russia some form of the capitalist mode of production would remain for a long time. In 1920 Lenin denied this, but a year later he came to accept this premise. Yes, Martov's report continued, the SDs were in favor of a dictatorship of the proletariat. But it must be in the form of a democracy of all laboring classes; it could not be a dictatorship of one party.² For true Marxists the dictatorship of the proletariat was inseparable from the rule of law, representative institutions, elections, and respect for the will of the majority of the laboring classes. In his reasoning Martov took every precaution to prevent Lenin from branding him a renegade. He wanted his message to come across as fair, reasonable, and Marxist. He was trying to convince Lenin that the route to socialism in Russia had to take a democratic path. It was also an appeal to the hearts and minds of rank-and-file Communists.³

At the same time, however, the SDs claimed that in fact the Soviet Constitution had not been implemented. There was no rule of law in Soviet Russia, nor a rule of soviets. Election rules were systematically violated, and authorities were accountable to no one. That was very dangerous for the future of the Russian revolution, since "a possibility is being created for the formation of a state within a state, that is, the transformation of the organs of repression and police surveillance, generated by the civil war, into an independent and all-powerful force."⁴ The Mensheviks saw their main political goal as ensuring that the democratic provisions of the Constitution were respected.⁵ They demanded that the Communists adhere to Soviet laws and electoral procedures.⁶ "Resumption of the Soviet Constitution and its continued democratization. Establishment of true accountability of all organs of Soviet power before the workers and peasants' masses. Proper functioning of and fair elections to the soviets. Freedom of assembly, speech, and association."⁷ The Mensheviks called on the Communists to prove that they desired peace by renouncing the use of force against those states which had seceded from the Russian Empire. In the newly elected Moscow Soviet, in March 1920, the Menshevik faction called on the Bolsheviks to grant real economic concessions to tens of millions of peasants by

² This idea stands out in Martov's article "Diktatura proletariata i demokratiia," Ts.P.A., Fond 275, TsKa RSDRP, Opis' 1, document 69.

³ RSDRP, *Mirovaia Sotsialisticheskaia revoliutsiia i zadachi Sotsial Demokratii*, Nicolaevsky Collection, series 6, box 6, folder 7. Also "Resheniia obshchepartiinogo soveshchaniia," *Proletarii*, no. 5 (25 April 1920), 2.

⁴ "Deklaratsiia RSDRP na 7om S'ezde Sovetov," in RSDRP, ed., *Sotsial-Demokratiia i revoliutsiia*, pp. 20–22.

⁵ See the summary of the Menshevik party line in "Taktika RSDRP v Sovetskoi Rossii" (13 July 1920), Nicolaevsky Collection, series 6, box 5, folder 17.

⁶ "Deklaratsiia fraktsii RSDRP v Mossoвете" (6 March 1920), in PSR Archive, RSDRP file, document 2020.

⁷ "Ko vsem Kievskim rabochim i rabotnitsam," Nicolaevsky Collection, series 6, box 6, folder 13.

renouncing the use of force in its food supply policy. The Mensheviks demanded that the trade unions remain independent workers' organizations.⁸ In other words the Mensheviks adopted the position of constructive and friendly critics. Their message to the Bolsheviks was clear: live up to your own Constitution, and there won't be any grounds for our opposition. Then one could envision cooperation among all socialist parties. This policy of loyal, legal opposition made it difficult for the Cheka arbitrarily to arrest opposition leaders for a word of criticism. A significant number, if not the majority, of Menshevik organizations welcomed this policy because it gave them a chance to survive, preserving their separate political identity.

The Mensheviks' new policy toward Bolshevism was not solely a matter of political opportunism. The course of the Russian civil war forced Martov to draw conclusions that moved him closer to Lenin. In a frank letter to his old friend and teacher Pavel Axelrod he lamented that what he called Russia's petite bourgeoisie (that is, the peasantry) and its party, the SRs, had proved incapable of preserving democracy after the Bolsheviks were overthrown in various parts of the country. Each time, political power had slipped from the democrats to the generals. "Under such conditions the immediate supremacy of democratic principles in the country now, after a long period of Leninist dictatorship and terror, would have produced doubtless a counterrevolutionary situation."⁹ In other words Bolshevik terror generated universal hostility toward all socialists. A majority of the Russian people were counterrevolutionary, or better to say antisocialist. Therefore, reasoned Martov, the Social Democrats had no choice but to struggle for democratization of the existing Soviet regime, not for its overthrow.

At the root of his reasoning was his fear of peasants, a view shared by many Mensheviks. As urban intellectuals preoccupied with Marxism, socialism, and the working class, the SDs feared the unbridled and unpredictable fluctuations in peasant political behavior. The peasants had welcomed the Bolsheviks in the fall of 1917, then withdrew from national politics in 1918, then rebelled against the Bolsheviks and welcomed the Whites as liberators in some areas, and then rebelled against them shortly thereafter. The Mensheviks welcomed concessions to peasants but feared the one-man, one-vote principle. They seemed to acknowledge that the wild gamble Lenin had embarked upon in 1917 could work. A workers' revolution in Russia could succeed by the resolute leadership of a revolutionary minority. Hence they were ready to work with the Communists in a fair system, dominated by workers, under the rule of law. Their optimism was based on the assumption that the Bolshevik dictatorship and proletarian dictatorship were one and the same thing. Yet the Mensheviks

⁸ Fedor Dan, "Revoliutsionnaia Sotsial Demokratia i professional'nye soiuzy" (speech at the Third All-Russian Congress of Trade Unions), *Proletarii*, no. 6 (1 March 1920), 2.

⁹ Iu. O. Martov to P. B. Axelrod (23 January 1920), Nicolaevsky Collection, series 17, box 51, folder 2.

themselves on numerous occasions in the past had asserted that the Bolshevik commissars had disfranchised the workers and that the supposed ruling class had no rights in Lenin's Russia. It seems that the Mensheviks shared the view that the Bolshevik dictatorship had nothing in common with a workers' dictatorship. Yet they held on to the fiction of a Communist-led workers' dictatorship as a kind of ideal model one should strive for, since that would have opened a way for democratization of the Bolshevik regime through the involvement of the masses of workers. The working class had some kind of miracle-making capacity to lead the Russian revolution toward socialism. Much in the Mensheviks' new platform was a product of wishful thinking and boundless fears.

The Bolsheviks, on their part, responded favorably to Menshevik conciliatory pronouncements. Rumors circulated in Russia and abroad that Martov and Dan would be offered posts in Lenin's government.¹⁰ The American embassy in London informed the State Department: "A wireless message from Moscow asserts that the Soviet government decided that representatives of other political parties will take part in negotiations. Thus the Soviet government affirms their determination to conform to the will of the whole nation."¹¹ Martov felt obliged to comment in a letter to Axelrod: "By the way it goes without saying that all the rumors to the effect that I, Fedor Il'ich, and others are going to enter the government are pure nonsense deliberately spread by the Asiatic diplomat Litvinov. Never have there been any negotiations or even hints at negotiations."¹²

The Bolsheviks had their own reasons for spreading these rumors. Whether the Mensheviks actually entered the government or not was unimportant. But the impression that the Bolsheviks were conducting negotiations with other political parties helped their image in Europe. Multiparty democracy and free laboring masses were associated with Lenin's Russia, and reactionary generals and foreign imperialists with the Whites. This at least was the image the Bolsheviks tried to convey to Europe. They needed a positive image in the spring of 1920 in order to pursue their foreign policy goals. On the one hand they wanted to force Western governments to cease all aid to the Whites and recognize the Soviet regime instead. On the other they were preparing for the proletarian revolution in the West. It was essential for the Bolsheviks to sustain their claim to be the leaders of the international workers' movement. They were trying to convince left-wing Socialist and Social Democratic parties that Soviet Russia was in fact the land of the victorious proletariat and that they should send their representatives to the Third International in Moscow, the headquarters of the coming world proletarian revolution. For these reasons the Bolsheviks

¹⁰ "En Russie des Soviets," *La République Russe*, no. 7 (1 April 1920), 3.

¹¹ To Secretary of State, "Compilation Wireless News March 1-20" (Warsaw, 5 March 1920), Records, dispatch 861.00.6638, p. 4.

¹² Iu. O. Martov to P. B. Axelrod (23 January 1920), Nicolaevsky Collection, series 17, box 51, folder 2.

abolished the death penalty in February 1920, allowed the Mensheviks and SRs to take part in local elections to soviets, tolerated Menshevik leadership of several trade unions, and promised permits for the resumption of an opposition press.¹³

Successes and Perils

The policy of loyal, legal opposition was good for the survival of the SD party. It was attractive to certain categories of workers who felt loyal to the idea of Soviet power but were angered by the hardships imposed on them by the system of militarized labor. Especially in the south of Russia and those parts of Ukraine just cleared of the Whites, where Menshevik organizations were strong and not yet decimated by the Cheka, the Menshevik political platform was very popular. This was manifested in the spring of 1920 by the election returns to the local city soviets. The Mensheviks were the clear winner among the workers in Kharkov. They also did very well in Rostov-on-Don, Kiev, and most other Ukrainian cities. In their traditional strongholds in Russia, such as Tula, Sor-movo, and Bryansk, they showed a remarkably strong vote among workers. Even in Moscow the Mensheviks won 50 seats to the city soviet. All except two of their candidates were elected. Martov wrote with jubilation to a colleague: "Everywhere, where we were able to nominate candidates, despite the lack of freedom of campaigning, our candidates went through." The party gained 50 seats in Moscow, 205 in Kharkov, 120 in Ekaterinoslav, 78 in Kremenchug, 30 in Poltava, 11 in Nikolayev, 30 in Kiev, 20 in Bezhitsa, 50 in Tula, 8 in Tver, 20 in Gomel, 15 in Vitebsk, 30 in Smolensk, 20 in Samara, and 30 in Irkutsk.¹⁴ In a report on the elections the Menshevik Central Committee informed local organizations that the margin of Menshevik victories would have been much greater if elections had been conducted properly and fairly. In numerous cases the Bolsheviks applied a winner-gets-all rule if they were leading but proportional representation if the Mensheviks were leading. In some cities the party could campaign unimpeded, as in Kharkov, whereas in other cities, such as Iuzovka, Taganrog, and scores of others, no campaigning at all was possible.¹⁵ Menshevik CC secretary B. Skomorovsky wrote to Axelrod about a worker in Moscow, Zaitsev, arrested on the eve of elections and held in prison without any charges. "They have simply removed a competitor who would have been

¹³ For the text of Dzerzhinsky's order on abolition of the death penalty, see "Vsem Gubcheka. Noveye usloviia bor'by s kontrevoliutsiei," in Dzerzhinsky, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia v dvukh tomakh*, vol. 1, pp. 199–200.

¹⁴ Iu. O. Martov to E. L. Broido (26 June 1920), Nicolaevsky Collection, series 17, box 51, folder 9.

¹⁵ "Dokladnaia zapiska Glavnogo Komiteta RSDRP na Ukraine" (9 August 1920), *ibid.*, series 6, box 5, folder 46.

elected to the soviet.”¹⁶ Nevertheless, the CC report concluded: “In spite of the difficult and abnormal conditions the Social Democrats had to face during the election campaign, elections to the soviets, consumer cooperatives, trade unions, and worker conferences have given our party enormous success in the workers’ milieu which has surpassed all our expectations.”¹⁷

Menshevik successes in elections, however, did not and could not bring any tangible participation in local affairs or guarantee the personal security of those elected. The soviets in the provincial cities did not have even vestiges of political power, and the Communists were no longer embarrassed by this. These cities were firmly in the hands of the local CP, the Cheka, and the military, be it in the form of a revolutionary committee, executive committee, or some other committee. All the Mensheviks could do in a city soviet was to offer a cautious critique of Communist policy, which would be voted down immediately. Nevertheless the election returns were important for everyone concerned. They gave confidence to the Social Democrats that they had a constituency, that it was a workers’ constituency, and that it was growing. And this reminded the Bolsheviks that if elections were free and fair the Mensheviks, as in the past, would offer strong competition.

Despite this public affirmation that the SD party was alive, the policy of making ideological and political concessions contained serious perils for the Menshevik party. Martov himself mentioned two of them in his letter to Axelrod. The first peril was that, with the acceptance of the Soviet system in principle, the Menshevik identity as a political party that stood for a different political and moral order was severely undermined. Was it worth all the trouble and hardship of being a member of an opposition party when few matters of principle distinguished the opposition from the ruling party? Was it not more effective to join the Communists and offer criticism from within? Since Communist party membership guaranteed privileges and above all personal security, whereas membership in an opposition party brought only perils, many Mensheviks defected to the Bolsheviks in the spring of 1920. Martov lamented that defections had acquired the proportions of a flood.¹⁸ L. M. Khinchuk, the former chairman of the Moscow soviet who had denounced the Bolshevik seizure of power at the Second Congress of Soviets back in October 1917, Ivan Maisky, former CC member and a minister of labor in the SR-led government of the Constituent Assembly in Samara in 1918, and many many other prominent old-time Social Democrats now switched to the Communists. Fedor Dan, in a letter to Axelrod, explained that a “simple desire to participate in social and political life pushed many active party members to the Bolshevik ranks.”¹⁹ Dan

¹⁶ B. Skomorovsky to P. Axelrod (25 June 1920), Axelrod Archive.

¹⁷ *Sbornik rezoliutsii i tezisev Tsentral'nogo Komiteta RSDRP i partiinykh soveshchanii*, p. 4.

¹⁸ Iu. O. Martov to E. L. Broido (26 June 1920), Nicolaevsky Collection, series 17, box 51, folder 9.

¹⁹ F. I. Dan to P. B. Axelrod (31 January 1920), *ibid.*, series 16, box 45, folder 9.

implied that these people were not content to limit their political career to ritual readings of protest declarations which were ignored and forgotten within minutes.

The second peril, according to Martov, was a decline of Menshevik influence on workers despite electoral successes. As he explained to Axelrod:

Insofar as we tried to act, we found ourselves in the sad situation which any party defending moderate ideas against fanatics and sectarians encounters in a period of sharp civil war. That is, we had a sympathetic audience, but it was always by far to the right of us. Following a healthy instinct, all those who were suppressed by the Bolsheviks willingly supported us, as the bravest opponents of Bolshevism. But what suited them in our preaching was only that part which condemned and exposed Bolshevism. As long as we condemned the Bolsheviks, they applauded us, but as soon as we went over to arguing that another regime was necessary for the purpose of a successful struggle with Denikin and for the final victory of the international proletariat over reactionary forces, our audience turned cold and even hostile.²⁰

To retain the support of workers exasperated by the militarized labor system, the Mensheviks needed to sharpen their criticism of Bolshevism; yet to avoid repressions, they needed to moderate their tone. Martov's policy was to continue this balancing between the two options, but before long it would break down.

Martov did not mention several other perils his policy contained. That was done by his critics, the Right Mensheviks. In frank letters to Axelrod, Boris Vasiliev, a party member from its very foundation and chairman of the Don party committee in Rostov-on-Don, and S. M. Zaretskaia, a CC member in 1917, subjected Martov's policy to devastating criticism. What worried them most was that for the sake of political survival Martov's policy had led the party to abandon its ideals. Ideological concessions to Bolshevism, argued Zaretskaia, did not and could not secure the party's survival, because its successes in elections were due to its oppositional stance. The more the Mensheviks blurred their difference from the Bolsheviks, the less attractive they would become for the workers.²¹ Ideological concessions bred intolerance of criticism and the adoption of dictatorial policies toward critics within the party. Vasiliev wrote: "This manifests itself in the fact that any word of criticism is perceived as a personal insult, and the person who thinks differently is immediately noted as a 'suspicious' person."²² All the leading positions in the party, he claimed, were divided among Martov's supporters. The composition of the Central Committee did not correspond to the range of political opinion in the party. The fear of anything that could smack of "counterrevolution" went so far that party members who spoke openly about Bolshevik atrocities were os-

²⁰ Iu. O. Martov to P. B. Axelrod (23 January 1920), *ibid.*, series 17, box 51, folder 2.

²¹ S. M. Zaretskaia to Pavel Axelrod (28 June 1920), *ibid.*, series 16, box 45, folder 12-13.

²² Boris Vasil'ev to P. B. Axelrod (6 August 1920), Axelrod Archive.

tracized. He cited the case of A. Lockerman of the Don committee, who, after serving a jail sentence, came to Moscow. The Moscow SD party committee refused to include him in the party roster because in 1918 Lockerman had published a brochure describing Bolshevik atrocities in Rostov-on-Don. His criticism of Bolshevik rule in 1918 was held against him in 1920, even though in 1918 his accusations had been supported by the party. Vasiliev contended that the so-called left political position was for many Mensheviks nothing more than careerist opportunism:

Moral unscrupulousness went so far that young men who had been summoned by the party and sent to all kinds of [civil war] fronts accepted posts of investigators in the revolutionary tribunals (Lande and Yakubson). Moreover functionaries of the first caliber like I. Shtern, member of the Main [party] Committee in Ukraine, turned out to be chairmen of the Captured Enemy Matériel Commission, whose job it was to count the stolen goods. Moreover they were seen riding in the automobile of Budenyi, Voroshilov, and others [Red Army commanders] exactly at the time when a pogrom orgy was still going on in the devastated cities.²³

The instinct for survival had guided these men, and the weakest of them had defected to the Communists. Intolerance and dictatorial practices went so far that entire party organizations of cities and provinces were disbanded, not by the Bolsheviks, but by the Menshevik Central Committee, thus helping the Cheka to destroy the party. For disagreement with official party policy, Menshevik city organizations in Rostov-on-Don, Odessa, and Saratov were disbanded. Moreover, the Right Mensheviks had been arbitrarily expelled from the city organizations of Petrograd, Kharkov, and Ekaterinoslav. Many factory workers, old-time SD party members, quit the party in protest against these repressions.

Vasiliev characterized the official Social Democratic party as a party of grumbling bureaucrats. They were aware of the fact that they had detached themselves from the workers, but they blamed the workers and not themselves for this. Vasiliev continued his indictment: "In fact official Social Democracy has spent its revolutionary enthusiasm, lost not only its political but also its moral values, and detached itself from the popular movement. Furthermore it is proud of it, counterpoising its revolutionary spirit and the ostensibly reactionary spirit of the masses."²⁴ In other words the official party line was that the masses were dark and reactionary. In order to defend the "revolution" one had to defend the existing order. In fact, claimed Vasiliev, they defended the existing order because they had gotten used to it and were relatively comfortable under it.

Vasiliev did not share Martov's view that the masses were reactionary. He

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

believed that the official party leadership had invented this myth to justify its capitulation to the Bolsheviks. There was nothing reactionary in condemning Bolshevism and rising against it in struggle. It was absurd to maintain that workers going on strike against the militarization of labor were reactionary whereas the Bolshevik order, propped up by the Cheka terror, was revolutionary. For Right Mensheviks like Vasiliev the Bolsheviks' record since October 1917 had already demonstrated that to expect democratic socialism from them was no less than to engage in self-delusion. That is why, when Red Army troops entered Rostov-on-Don in February 1920, the local Social Democrats adopted, as they put it, an "irreconcilable position." They protested against the robberies and killings by the conquerors. As a result of the supposed "liberation," the military clique of the Whites was replaced by that of the Reds. Vasiliev was elected to the city soviet. At the opening session he read the declaration of his party. A newspaper account described the scene:

Vasiliev takes the floor. The Communists prick up their ears with hostility. The impatient ones shout out. Vasiliev continues. The words are flowing and suddenly the words "Constituent Assembly." And a hubbub rises. Someone screams hysterically. All of this Communist mass rumbles and roars. An old Communist comes out. He proposes to exile Vasiliev to Crimea, Denikin's country. Again rumbling. Inexplicable joy and jubilation. Gurvich, a [Menshevik] internationalist, breaks through to the podium: "We protest. You insult the soviet!" Vasiliev forces his way through to the podium as well. Hissing and whistling. He has to leave. They vote for his expulsion and exile.²⁵

The SD Don committee was tried by the Revolutionary Tribunal, and Vasiliev was sentenced to five years imprisonment.²⁶ To make things worse, the Menshevik CC disbanded the legitimately elected and supposedly legal SD Don committee. For Vasiliev this amounted to a total break with the ideals and principles he had served for a quarter of a century in the good old Social Democratic party.

Throughout the civil war years the Right Mensheviks displayed more ideological consistency than the official party. They had always been unanimous in their rejection and condemnation of Bolshevism. They were equally adamant in rejecting Martov's recognition of the legitimacy of Soviet power. In another bitter letter to Martov the Right Mensheviks wrote: "We consider that the acceptance of the government of Bolshevik Chekas is tantamount to acceptance of the enslavement of the Russian proletariat in the clutches of the Bolshevik Cheka."²⁷

²⁵ "V Sovete," *Proletarii*, no. 4 (21 April 1920), 1.

²⁶ No title, a letter from Butyrki jail, dated 19 September 1921, to the Editorial Board of *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*. It is clear from contents that the authors of the letter are members of the imprisoned Don committee of the RSDRP, PSR Archive, document 2047.

²⁷ A letter to Martov (18 February 1921), Stepan Ivanovich (Portugeis) Archive.

Yet there was no unanimity among the Right Mensheviks on many aspects of ideology and politics. As Vasiliev reported to Axelrod, throughout 1920 the Right Mensheviks drafted several declarations trying to elaborate their views on the nature of the social and political transformation in Russia.²⁸ A group of Right Mensheviks drafted a plan of development for Russia from "communism" to what they called state capitalism, a system which would rest on the three pillars of political democracy, the rule of law, and a mixed economy of private and state enterprise. They proposed to abandon altogether the term "dictatorship of the proletariat." It put the working class above others. What was needed was not something divisive but something to unify the nation. They saw the historical mission of Russian Social Democracy as resolving Russia's *national* tasks. They rejected a "class" approach to politics and stressed all human values. These Right Mensheviks went so far as to suggest that it was futile to endeavor to analyze the existing so-called Soviet system of social, political, and economic relations by Marxist methodology. Marxism was not applicable any longer. The Soviet system was "unforeseen" by Marxism.

the overall policy of Soviet power emerges more and more as a struggle against any manifestations of democracy, a curbing of political rights, a liquidating of civil liberties, a suppressing of the activities of all those who are not regime supporters, a bureaucratizing of government, and finally a militarizing of the entire social order that combines bureaucratic rule with the absence of civil rights for the population. What is being created now is a new form of barracks-like socialism, unforeseen by Marxism.²⁹

The so-called proletarian revolution in Russia not only did not abolish exploitation but exacerbated it. The Soviet ruling class was unlike any other. It was not even a class in the Marxist sense, since it could not be defined in terms of ownership of the means of production. The new elite did not own them but controlled them as a collective entity, each of whose members could be deprived of his or her privileged position at any time. It was not a class but a new Communist estate with limited tenure.

What thrives in such abnormal conditions is boundless arbitrary rule, bribery, and corruption. In the end, when people are deprived of civil rights and subjected to repression, a new privileged estate of Communists rises over the rest of the population. This estate has the exclusive right to enjoy the benefits of life and, closed to the public eye, willingly uses its dominant position to make arrangements of all kinds, unbound by any legal constraints.³⁰

²⁸ For a discussion of the Right Mensheviks' declaration, see Vardin, *Revoliutsiia i men'shevizm*, pp. 126–29.

²⁹ "Report of the Right Mensheviks," no date or author, Nicolaevsky Collection, series 6, box 5, folder 29, published in English in Brovkin, ed., *Dear Comrades*, p. 230

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 231.

With this kind of thinking, these right Mensheviks embarked upon the same intellectual road that many Western Social Democrats would take later in the century. In so doing they foreshadowed ideas expressed in the late 1980s by M. S. Gorbachev and his group of reformers. In the context of 1920, however, this line of reasoning was nothing but seditious counterrevolution, not only for the Bolsheviks but for the official Menshevik party leaders as well.

Such a sharp and perceptive critique of the Soviet system could have implied that the Right Mensheviks would not be opposed to a revolutionary struggle against Bolshevik oppression, at least in principle. However, only some of them adopted this position. These were usually Social Democrats who had broken with the official SD party. Their May Day leaflet in Petrograd showed neither fear of, nor compromise with, the Bolsheviks:

The country is in famine, the population is dying out, the workers are dying too. But we are told: "Everything for the front." . . . What is it that prevents peace with other countries? Only the Russian Communists. What does the clique ruling over Russia want? It wants domination, recognition, and preservation of its power at whatever cost! ³¹

They came out in support of the Kronstadt rebellion in March 1921 and endorsed strike actions by Petrograd workers. But the official SD party leadership wanted nothing to do with the workers' and peasants' anti-Communist movement. At the end of 1920 the SD Main Committee in Ukraine came to the following decision:

By their policies the Bolshevik authorities have isolated the proletariat in the extreme and have caused hostility to it on the part of the nonproletarian elements (petite bourgeoisie and peasants). This makes possible and even probable the rise of a petit bourgeois movement which may involve and has already begun to involve large masses of anti-Communist proletariat. As a movement of nonproletarian classes directed against the ugly Bolshevik dictatorship, peasants' and soldiers' upheavals even under the most favorable circumstances would objectively lead to the elimination of the possibility of directing the course of the Russian revolution toward socialism. ³²

Surprisingly some Right Menshevik groups, mostly those who had remained within the SD party, were just as opposed to a revolutionary overthrow of the Bolshevik regime as was the Menshevik CC. Vasiliev cited a letter of the southern Right Mensheviks which "denounced any kind of solidarity and connection with the popular movement of masses directed against [Soviet] power," because counterrevolutionary forces would be the beneficiaries of such upheaval. It seems that the Mensheviks were mesmerized by the experience of

³¹ "Gruppa Sotsial Demokratov (May 1920), Stepan Ivanovich (Portugeis) Archive.

³² Glavnyi Komitet RSDRP na Ukraine (1 December 1920), RSDRP Archive.

1917, when the workers' movement had spun out of control, propelled by those who shouted louder and demanded ever more, and had ended up with a dictatorship of the self-proclaimed "vanguard of the proletariat." As a result of the 1917 experience the Mensheviks and the SRs distrusted the masses and feared great social upheavals. They would rather suffer under the Bolsheviks than venture into the unknown whirlpool of popular wrath.

The Left SR Factions

The only exception to this fear of the masses was the party of the Left Socialist Revolutionaries. Like other opposition parties in 1920 the Left SRs faced a vexing dilemma: How could they preserve their party without compromising their principles? Two factions fought each other over this dilemma.³³ The faction led by Isaak Steinberg held views hardly different from those of Martov's Mensheviks. They condemned armed struggle against the Soviet regime, supported the Red Army in the war with Poland, aspired to take an active part in socialist construction, and mildly criticized the Bolshevik food supply policy. A majority of the Left SR CC favored this course. A minority, however, led by Mariia Spiridonova, exhibited a revolutionary rejection of Bolshevism. For Spiridonova no compromise with the Bolsheviks was possible, since they had abused Russian peasants worse than the old regime. In a letter to a colleague Spiridonova wrote: "The Bolsheviks are the assassins and executioners of freedom, and they must be overthrown as speedily as possible."³⁴

Of all the opposition parties the minority Left SRs were the most uncompromising critics of the Bolsheviks in 1920. For them the Bolsheviks were traitors to the October revolution and to the ideals they themselves had sworn allegiance to. Their hatred of the Communists exceeded even that of the Right Mensheviks, who argued that they had always known the true nature of Bolshevism. The Right Mensheviks were detached and cool in their self-righteousness, but the minority Left SRs were passionate and vehement. For them the Bolsheviks had turned into a parasitic bureaucracy which exploited the Russian peasants. Spiridonova wrote to a colleague in Lithuania: "I do not know what your Bolsheviks are like, but in the south of Russia they have rapidly adopted the usual methods of government and are threatening to shoot thousands of peasants. . . . It is impossible to describe the depths to which individual officials have fallen . . . who have been given full power over the people. If you only knew how the Bolsheviks get drunk, how immoral they are, how dissolute, how mendacious and caddish they have grown."³⁵ In the war with

³³ On the Left SR party split, see "Partiinaia Zhizn'. Ko vsem chlenam partii levykh SR," *Izvestiia* (26 October 1920), 4.

³⁴ "A Letter by Mariia Spiridonova," *Struggling Russia*, vol. 1, no. 50–51 (6 March 1920), 798.

³⁵ "Socialists' Denouncement of Bolshevism," *Bulletins of the Russian Liberation Committee*, no. 46 (10 January 1920), 3.

Poland the Bolsheviks used Russian peasants as cannon fodder for their adventurous plans of conquest. In a protest leaflet the minority Left SRs spoke of "a shameful alliance of Soviet bureaucrats, tsarist generals, and Leninist commissars which is trying to lay the foundations of a so-called socialist order in Poland."³⁶ The minority Left SRs condemned the commissars' privileges, their reliance on naked force, and their suppression of civil liberties. In contrast to Steinberg's Left SRs and the mainstream SRs, who for the time being, at least publicly, rejected armed struggle against the Communists, Spiridonova's Left SRs declared that they would take up arms in defense of peasants. The people had a right to rise against despotism.

For a long time details of the Left SRs' revolutionary struggle against the Bolsheviks have remained unknown. The Left SRs themselves never made them public due to the covert nature of their activity. The Bolsheviks kept the documents they had in folders marked top secret. Yet we can now learn from a report to Dzerzhinsky by a Cheka infiltrator into the Left SR party leadership that he had attended Left SR Central Committee meetings regularly and dutifully recorded what was being said. The Left SRs discussed their links with Green bands of peasant rebels in Tambov, Voronezh, and other southern Russian provinces. They discussed setting up a supply system for the Greens and organizing deserters, and they talked about numerous specific cases of local peasant rebellions. They were the organizers of many peasant unions in the countryside. The main thrust of their activity was to lead peasant masses if they rose in rebellion against the Bolsheviks.³⁷ As we shall see, they played an important and perhaps the leading role in the peasant war against the Bolsheviks which flared up with new vigor in the fall of 1920. Political alignments in Soviet Russia in the spring of 1920 were the opposite of early 1918. The Bolsheviks' allies then, the Left SRs, now turned into bitter enemies, while the Bolsheviks' bitter enemies then, the Mensheviks and mainstream SRs, sought accommodation.

The Balancing Act Breaks Down: The Affair with the British Delegation

Martov admitted that in the spring of 1920 his party reduced its criticism of the Communists to a minimum. Everything was done to preserve the Menshevik party's legal status. Yet unanticipated developments led to a breakdown of this balancing act. The Mensheviks were compelled to take a stand, which in turn

³⁶ Reproduced in "Tsirkuliarnoe pis'mo Vecheka," in Nicolaevsky Collection, series 89, box 143, folder 5, here p. 19.

³⁷ "Nachal'niku Sekretnogo Osvedomitel'nogo Otdela. Svodka no. 27 agenturno osvedomitel'nykh materialov po doneseniui osvedomitelia Volnova" (6 March 1921) (To the chief of the Secret Intelligence Department. Report no. 27 of the intelligence materials based on the report of agent Volnov), Ts.P.A., Dzerzhinsky Archive, Fond 76, Opis' 3, document 167.

led to a new cycle of repressions and a virtual decimation of the party by the Cheka.

The Communists' two main objectives in the international arena that spring were to force the Allies to abandon their economic sanctions against Communist Russia and to position themselves as the leaders of the international workers' movement. For that they needed to split Western European Socialist and Social Democratic parties and to create Communist parties. Spring 1920 was the season of foreign delegations arriving in Soviet Russia. A British Labour party delegation arrived in May and was followed by French, Italian, and German delegations in June and July, to mention only a few. Feverish activity was going on in preparation for the Second Congress of the Third Communist International.

The role that the Communists assigned to the Mensheviks in this grand design was to assist them in portraying Soviet Russia as a country of the victorious proletariat, a multiparty democracy where all currents of socialist thought were amicably competing with one another. Martov's April theses and a resolute campaign for Allied recognition of Communist Russia seemed to be in tune with the Bolshevik requirements. Even the incorrigible SRs reiterated their rejection of armed struggle against the Communist regime. It was one thing, however, to defend the Soviet Constitution and international recognition and quite another to participate in the Bolshevik propaganda show. The Mensheviks and SRs, including Martov and Chernov, did not want to be used by the Bolsheviks in duping Western European socialists. The arrival of Western delegations gave the Mensheviks and SRs the first opportunity since October 1917 to make their voice heard in Europe on what was actually going on in Russia. Martov, Dan, and Chernov were widely known in European socialist circles. Their evidence could not simply be brushed aside as bourgeois propaganda.

The British delegation of trade unionists and Labour leaders was the first to arrive in May 1920. The Communists hailed their visit as a great victory. The delegation was taken to various commissariats and lectured on the achievements of socialist construction. Carefully selected worker collectives greeted them on behalf of the Russian working class. Orchestras played, and important meetings, processions, and banquets were held. Sumptuous delicacies were served at these receptions, the kind of food Russian workers had not seen for years.³⁸ The Bolshevik propaganda machine did its utmost to impress these foreign dignitaries of the labor movement and to insulate them from the Russian workers. Ben Turner's speech was censored beyond recognition in the Soviet press. To make sure that no unwanted information reached the British, the Cheka strictly controlled access to them. Dozens of letters by common

³⁸ Raphael Abramovich to P. B. Axelrod (22 July 1920), Nicolaevsky Collection, series 16, box 45, folder 5.

workers addressed to the British delegation were intercepted by the watchful Cheka, and their authors were dealt with accordingly.³⁹ As the Mensheviks later found out, the interpreters provided for the British delegation were also Cheka informers.

Yet the Communists could not prevent Raphail Abramovich from greeting the British delegation on behalf of the SD party at the session of the Moscow soviet, since the Mensheviks had a duly elected faction there.⁴⁰ Abramovich used this opportunity to propose that the British delegation familiarize itself with all political currents of socialism in Soviet Russia. The British felt it was only natural to hear out all points of view, and they willingly met with the Menshevik and SR central committees.⁴¹ As Abramovich later put it: "To their detailed questions we gave our detailed answers," in the form of a voluminous report on conditions in Soviet Russia.⁴² The SR Central Committee submitted its own report to the British, which differed markedly from that of the Mensheviks.⁴³ There was no praise there for the proletarian dictatorship or optimism about its future democratization. For the SRs the Russian Communists had "quickly and easily cast off the outward gilding of Scientific Socialism, showing underneath the Asiatic nature of enlightened despotism with a Communist lining." For the SRs, Russian Communism was an unfortunate heritage of Russian history:

Our regime is a strange mixture of new and old. In it you can see the triumph of a bureaucratically centralized system of barrack-discipline—with its heirloom bequeathed by the war—the infernal equality of all before the face of famine, requisitions, labor conscription, food, railway, and military dictatorships; you will see its indifference to human life, its system of imprisonment and terror, of unanimity coercively imposed on citizens, its abolition of personal and public freedom and its suppression of representative organizations.⁴⁴

Members of the British delegation asked the SR Central Committee members and particularly Chernov if the Bolshevik charges were true that the SRs supported armed struggle against Soviet government. According to the protocol of the meeting, Chernov responded that the SRs would not rise against the Bol-

³⁹ "Les Missions Socialistes dans la Russie des Soviets," *La République Russe*, no. 19 (18 October 1920), 2.

⁴⁰ "Inostrannye Sotsialisticheskie delegatsii v Sovetskoï Rossii," *Volia Rossii* (16 September 1920), 4.

⁴¹ Iu. O. Martov to P. B. Axelrod (30 May 1920), Nicolaevsky Collection, series 17, box 51, folder 2.

⁴² "Memorandum TsKa RSDRP Angliiskoi delegatsii," *ibid.*, series 6, box 5, folder 38–40.

⁴³ "Rech Abramovicha k Angliiskoi delegatsii," Ts.P.A., Fond 275, RSDRP, Opis' 1, document 68.

⁴⁴ Cited here from an excerpt in English in British Labour Delegation to Russia, 1920, *Report*, pp. 86–87. The full text is in "Predstaviteliam Angliiskogo proletariata," Ts.P.A., Fond 274, TsKa PSR, Opis' 1, document 2.

sheviks as long as there was danger from the Whites. Moreover, on numerous occasions the PSR had appealed to the Communists to resolve their differences by elections either to the soviets or to a new Constituent Assembly. The Bolsheviks had ignored those appeals, said Chernov, because they knew that they would be a minority party. The British interlocutors then asked Chernov what the PSR policy would be if and when there was no more danger from the Whites. Chernov's answer sounds prophetic indeed, showing his remarkable political foresight. He explained that what was going to happen in the near future in Russia was an armed popular rebellion against the Bolsheviks in the countryside if the Communists persisted in their policies. In that case, said Chernov, "We will be with the people."⁴⁵ The Bolsheviks were aware of these meetings but did not dare to prevent them, since that would have undercut their claim that all political currents of socialism had the right to exist. Similarly it would have been embarrassing to ban a meeting of British trade unionists with leaders of Russian trade unions. The Printers' Union was one of the three remaining ones whose leadership was still Social Democratic.

On 23 May a historic meeting sponsored by the Printers' Union took place in Moscow.⁴⁶ About four thousand printers were present. Speeches were given in honor of the British working class and the Russian revolution and socialism. After reiterating major points in the SD platform against Allied sanctions, A. F. Deviatkin, the printer's leader, uttered a few critical notes on the conditions of printers in Communist Russia. M. A. Kefali, another printer, referred to the Communist bosses as the new bourgeoisie which oppressed the workers.⁴⁷ Fedor Dan spoke for the Menshevik CC and went even further in his criticism. But what later caused both a sensation and a scandal was the speech by a mysterious, bearded representative of the Socialist Revolutionary party. This speaker also greeted the British but urged them not to believe the rosy picture that the official propaganda was painting for them. In fact, he said, the ruling party had turned into a network of bureaucracies, the workers could not express themselves freely, and police terror had acquired monstrous proportions: "Could the workers have imagined that instead of socialism they would get a new despotism, this time of the party; that this socialism of a special kind would put a muzzle on them, and that in its administrative system it would impose an oligarchical bureaucracy, and in its methods of government a barracks-like socialism, a kind of Arakcheev Communism in a new guise?"⁴⁸ The speaker

⁴⁵ "Protokol svidaniia Chernova s chlenami Angliiskoi delegatsii" (Protocol of Chernov's meeting with the British delegation) (23 June 1920), Ts. P. A., Fond 274, TsKa PSR, Opis' 1, document 1, p. 63.

⁴⁶ See appendix 5, "The Printers' Meeting at Moscow and the Printers' Trade Union," in British Labour Delegation to Russia, 1920, *Report*. See also a detailed account by B. Voytinsky, "Sotsialisty Zapada v Sovetskoi Rossii," *Bor'ba*, no. 226 (6 October 1920).

⁴⁷ "Les Anglais chez les Ouvriers Typographes," *Les Informations Démocratiques*, no. 19 (Summer 1920).

⁴⁸ Tschernow [Chernov], *Meine Schicksalle in Sowjet Russland*, pp. 41–42.

characterized the evolution of Lenin's socialism from 1917 to 1920 as a movement from Pugachevshchina (that is, incitement to free-for-all violence) to Arakcheevshchina (that is, a bureaucratic military dictatorship of the state). Neither version of Lenin's socialism had anything to do with real socialism. Addressing the workers, the speaker called on them to demand free elections and overcome their fear, "as I did, whose party comrades are in prison." The hall exploded with a stormy ovation. No one seemed to know who the man with a beard was. They shouted from the floor: "Identify yourself." All of a sudden the speaker pulled off his glued-on beard and said, "I am Chernov," and disappeared from the stage. There was commotion in the hall. The Communists were puzzled and embarrassed. As Chernov later related, a dozen SRs blocked all the exits, and he escaped before the watchful Cheka could seize him.

Chernov's dramatic appearance at the printers' rally and the fact that the chairman of the disbanded Constituent Assembly feared arrest was carried by major European newspapers. This incident attracted more attention than the long and detailed data in the Menshevik report. What made the scandal even more damaging for the Communists was their own admission that the Cheka was trying to capture Chernov.

The scandal at the printers' and other meetings with the British delegation had devastating consequences for the Menshevik and SR parties. It was probably after the British delegation affair that Communist leaders (if we are to judge by their actions) decided to destroy completely what was left of the opposition parties. Martov sensed this acutely, since he wrote to Axelrod on 30 May: "There is no doubt that devastation awaits us, either in the form of expulsion from the Moscow soviet (by the way, in the provinces they have already expelled us [from the soviets] in Odessa, Gomel, and Nikolaev) or in the form of mass arrests."⁴⁹ Provincial Chekas did not wait for a go-ahead from Moscow. Most of their reports on their policy toward the opposition parties demonstrate a systematic extraction of active politicians throughout 1920. Provincial Cheka reports to the All-Russian Cheka leave no doubt that they saw their duty as reporting any signs of Menshevik or SR/Left SR political activity. For example provincial Chekas reported: "Penza: Left SR propaganda materials were noticed among the peasants. Searches have been made at the right SRs'. A member of the PSR Central Committee, who arrived here for party work, has been detained. During a search an SR resolution on the current situation was found. Kharkov: A part of the organization of the SRs decided to split away and join the Narod group."⁵⁰

A regular subtitle in their reports was Measures Undertaken, which suggests

⁴⁹ Iu. O. Martov to P. B. Axelrod (30 May 1920), Nicolaevsky Collection, series 17, box 51, folder 2.

⁵⁰ "Informatsionnaia svodka sekretnogo otdela VeCheKa, tovarishchu Leninu" (1–14 February 1920), Ts.G.A.O.R., Fond 130, SNK, Opis' 3, document 414, p. 4.

that the provincial Chekas had the authority to undertake measures such as arrests and deportations of active politicians without clearing them with Moscow first. The Cheka kept a close eye on the activities of opposition parties and tried to stop them as soon as it perceived danger. Indeed the Bolshevik press exploded with a hysterical campaign. "Informers of Lloyd George! Traitors! Spies! Wreckers!"—these were the most frequent epithets. No sooner were the British gone than the Cheka went to work. On 30 May the All-Russian Cheka published an order to all local Chekas authorizing "merciless reprisals" against the "informers of Lloyd George."⁵¹ The fact that local Mensheviks somewhere in Ukraine may not even have heard about the 23 May rally of the Printers' Union did not matter.

On 1 June, clearly endorsing the Cheka action, the Moscow city CP committee published its theses stating that the governments of the Allied powers, in order to weaken the movement of the international proletariat in defense of Soviet Russia, had sent a trade union delegation to Russia to collect compromising material. The Mensheviks and SRs were portrayed as accomplices of foreign spies. On the next day the Menshevik caucus in the Moscow soviet tried to dispel these groundless accusations, reminding comrade Communists that they themselves had given speeches in honor of the representatives of the British proletariat. In response Bukharin insisted that there were supporters of Lloyd George in the British delegation and that the Mensheviks and SRs were guilty of transmitting information.⁵² In 1920 Bukharin thought that was criminal. From then on, for seven long decades, it became a crime to pass on critical information to foreigners.

Raphail Abramovich was deprived of his seat in the Moscow soviet. The workers who had elected him were told to recall him or else their food rations would be cut, and they complied.⁵³ Fedor Dan, who had spoken at the printers' rally, was conscripted as a physician and exiled to Ekaterinburg. On 17 June, late at night, the Cheka arrested eleven people, the entire Executive Committee of the Printers' Union. Its headquarters were occupied by the Cheka, and everyone who came in was detained, with some arrested. The Moscow printers went on strike in protest, which gave the Cheka a pretext to arrest the strikers and decimate an independent union in Communist Russia. Without any trial the Cheka collegium sentenced the arrested printers to various terms of internment in a concentration camp.⁵⁴

Special treatment was reserved for Victor Chernov. The Cheka must have

⁵¹ "Mouchards de Lloyd George," *La République Russe*, no. 19 (18 October 1920), 2.

⁵² "Pis'mo TsKa RSDRP Angliiskoi delegatsii," Nicolaevsky Collection, series 6, box 5, folder 37. See also "Un Document. Lettre du Comité Central du parti Social Democrat de Russie a la délégation du Labour party," *Pour La Russie*, no. 12 (13 October 1920).

⁵³ "Les Missions Socialistes dans la Russie des Soviets," *La République Russe*, no. 19 (18 October 1920), 2.

⁵⁴ "La Suppression du Syndicat des Typographes de Moscou," *La République Russe*, no. 19 (18 October 1920), 3. The details of this case are in an open letter to the CEC by the printers "Zaiavlenie" in "Sovetskaia vlast' i rabochie," *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 5 (April 1921), 24–25.

perceived his appearance at the printers' rally as an insult to its efficiency. For months the Cheka had been doing all in its power to capture Chernov. Ambushes were placed in the apartments of friends, relatives, and party comrades he was known to visit. On one occasion Cheka agents went around to villages in the vicinity where Chernov used to spend summers and showed his photograph to peasants, asking them if they had seen him. Of course the peasants swore that they had not and crossed themselves. The entire area was surrounded by Cheka troops. Several times Chernov escaped these traps by sheer good luck. On one occasion Cheka agents forged a letter to Chernov from E. M. Ratner, an SR Central Committee member in prison. Chernov contacted Ratner, and the Cheka provocation was exposed. Unable to capture Chernov, the Cheka seized his wife, hoping that his daughters, left all alone, would try to contact him and provide the Cheka with a good lead. They did not and were seized as hostages as well. In prison they were interrogated persistently on Chernov's whereabouts. Cheka agents were placed in their cell, pretending to be friends who would pass on a message to Chernov upon release. These disgusting methods led Chernov to write a bitter letter, full of sarcasm, to Lenin:

I congratulate the Council of People's Commissars on the occasion of its great success on the internal front. A few days ago your agents arrested my wife and three daughters, the oldest being seventeen and the youngest, seven years of age. . . . I realize, of course, that maddened by repeated failures and embittered by the futile hunt after me, that worthy institution has to vent its spleen on someone. I also realize that sick women and children make a fitting object for vengeance at the stage of moral development to which it is but natural for the minions and gendarmes of degenerating regimes to fall. I congratulate you on this manifest proof, this vivid illustration of that state to which your rule and its bearers have sunk.⁵⁵

Chernov's friend Ida Germus approached Kamenev and Lunacharsky, asking them to do something to release Chernov's family. She reported Kamenev as saying: "They will be kept as hostages." Kamenev's wife, Olga, however, knew Chernov's wife well from the better days of their acquaintance in Paris before the war. She decided to take Ariada, the youngest of Chernov's daughters, to stay with the Kamenevs in their apartment in the Kremlin. That moved Chernov to write another indignant letter, now to Kamenev demanding that all his children be handed over to the International Red Cross. Chernov continued to evade Cheka capture. But five other members of the SR Central Committee—M. A. Vedeniapin, E. M. Timofeev, A. R. Gots, M. S. Tseitlin, and F. D. Rakov—were less fortunate. They were seized and imprisoned in June and July without any charges.⁵⁶

Chernov was not the only one whose family was taken hostage. In a letter to

⁵⁵ Tschernow [Chernov], *Meine Schicksalle in Sowjet Russland*, p. 33. See also the text of the letter in "Victor Chernov's Family Taken as Hostages," *Information Bulletin*, no. 10-12 (23 October 1920), 6-7.

⁵⁶ *CheKa* (1922), p. 179.

the British trade unionists, arrested socialists wrote that the wife of another Socialist Revolutionary, A. T. Kuznetsov, had been seized as well "and flogged in prison for refusing to divulge her husband's whereabouts."⁵⁷ Arrests in Moscow were imitated in the provinces. According to the Printers' Union, three hundred printers were arrested in the aftermath of the British delegation visit. In Nikolayev eleven deputies to the city soviet, Social Democrats, were expelled from the soviet at the very first session after elections for "abstention at the vote for comrade Lenin." The fact that this was a violation of the Constitution and of electoral law did not bother them or the Moscow Bolsheviks.⁵⁸ In Ekaterinburg twelve Mensheviks, including Dalin, a Central Committee member, were arrested during the election campaign. In Simbirsk the entire Menshevik party committee was arrested after a workers' strike in protest against a ten-hour workday at a munitions factory. In Samara a printer, Alekseev, was sentenced by the Revolutionary Tribunal to ten years in a forced-labor camp for "participating in the strike of printers."⁵⁹ In Petrograd a worker, Shpakovsky, a member of the city soviet, was sentenced to one year in a forced-labor camp because the factory administration had found Menshevik leaflets on the occasion of May Day, even though officially the Menshevik party was legal.

As hundreds of workers and socialists were taken hostage and special units burned Russian villages as "counterrevolutionary nests" of Green bandits, the Second Congress of the Third International opened in Moscow to celebrate the coming of the world proletarian revolution. Speeches about international workers' solidarity and the achievements of socialist construction in Russia were followed by parades of happy worker collectives, banquets, and the singing of the "Internationale." The Bolsheviks showed to foreign Communists a masterpiece of their propaganda art. The entire city of Petrograd was turned into a theater stage. The soldiers and sailors were turned into actors. They were told to play heroic proletarians marching after the Bolsheviks. The storming of the Winter Palace in 1917 was reenacted. All the chaos and unpredictability of the real event were of course forgotten; now everything went according to script. Life was becoming indistinguishable from theater. Everybody was to follow the party script.

Other Foreign Delegations

The British delegation affair was a catalyst for the breakdown of Martov's balancing act. In May and June other matters of principle arose that Martov

⁵⁷ The appeal of the imprisoned socialists "To the British Workmen and to the Members of the Labor Delegation to Russia," in Samuel Gompers, "Labor Victims and the Serfs of the Soviets," *American Federationist*, vol. 28 (28 March 1921), 213.

⁵⁸ "La Répression contre les Mencheviki. En Russie des Soviets," *La République Russe*, no. 19 (18 October 1920), 3.

⁵⁹ "Arrestations et Condamnations des Militants syndicalistes et socialistes," *La République Russe*, no. 16 (1 September 1920), 4.

could not compromise on despite his willingness to seek an understanding with the Bolsheviks. The first was Lenin's policy on war and peace with Poland and the second his intrigues to split Western SD parties and attract the leftists to the Communist fold. Martov understood that for Lenin war was the implementation of policy by other means. Already in May, in his speech to the Moscow soviet, Martov was condemning "adventures abroad" and urging the Bolsheviks to abandon plans to bring a Communist revolution to Poland with the help of Red Army bayonets.⁶⁰ In a letter to a colleague Martov wrote in June that "war feeds Bolshevism, since it is an unnatural economic system and Asiatic administration."⁶¹ Martov believed that Lenin needed war in order to unite his party and to create a bond between the cause of Russian patriotism and the cause of the Communist revolution. Martov warned Kautsky that Lenin wanted to export Communist revolution to Poland.⁶² After its occupation by the Red Army, power was to pass to the Revolutionary Committee, headed by the Cheka chief himself, Feliks Dzerzhinsky. If things went well, Lenin was not averse to proceeding with a Communist revolution in Germany, led by the Communist party. It would have to be created by splitting the German Independent Social Democratic Party (USPD). In June and July 1920 the Bolsheviks conducted difficult negotiations with the USPD on the terms of its affiliation with the Third International.

Martov saw through Lenin's plans and did his utmost to wreck them. He foresaw that the Communist International would become a tool for expansionism in Lenin's hands. He wrote to Kautsky that it was essential "to free the European workers' movement from Bolshevik domination."⁶³ Martov feared that if the cause of the workers' socialist movement were associated with what he called Lenin's Asiatic socialism, the future of that movement would be ruined. With his colleagues in Europe, Martov strove for the rest of his life to formulate an alternative to Lenin's socialism for the left-wing labor socialist movement. His immediate objective was to convince European left-wing SD parties not to join Lenin's International and to create instead their own association of socialist and labor parties that would have nothing to do with Lenin's "Comintern" or with the old and, as he believed, discredited Second International. As happened so many times in the tumultuous relationship between Martov and Lenin, a period of rapprochement was followed by a new round of bitter political struggle.

Making contact with foreign visitors was not easy for the Mensheviks. Most people in these delegations arrived in Moscow for the explicit purpose of negotiating their membership in the Communist International. They were not

⁶⁰ "Lettre aux organisations du parti mencheviste," *La République Russe*, no. 19 (18 October 1920), 4.

⁶¹ *Iu. O. Martov to A. N. Stein* (26 June 1920), Nicolaevsky Collection, series 17, box 51, folder 4.

⁶² *Iu. O. Martov to Karl Kautsky* (27 June 1920), *ibid.*, folder 5.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

particularly interested in hearing critical voices. Each delegation consisted of representatives of various political currents who were concerned with how their reports on the situation in Russia would be received at home. Marcel Cachin and Louis-Oscar Frossard of the French Socialist party simply refused to meet with the Russian socialists. Moreover, Cachin was expected to pass some letters along to Martov, but somehow these letters wound up with the Cheka.⁶⁴ The Italian delegation, too, refused to meet officially with the Menshevik Central Committee. Only Giacinto Seratti and Luciano Magrini met with Martov privately and received a thick packet of materials on social and economic conditions in Soviet Russia. An attentive observer like Magrini did not need Martov to understand what was going on in the country. He eloquently described the meager food rations, pervasive poverty, injustice, and privileges in his *La Catastrofe Russa*. Similar impressions were reported by the Czechoslovak labor delegation. They were particularly astonished by the material and spiritual poverty: "Petrograd, once a bustling capital now appears altogether dead. All shops, stores, everything is closed. All buildings are neglected and filthy . . . There is no political life in Russia at all. It does not exist there in the sense as we know it here in Western Europe. . . . Russia is ruled exclusively by the Bolshevik party. All other socialist parties . . . are forbidden to publish newspapers and hold meetings."⁶⁵ In spite of their reluctance to meet with Russian socialists and their desire to see positive achievements in Soviet Russia, the Western socialists' observations were a public relations disaster for the Bolsheviks. Major newspapers in Germany, France, England, Italy, and central Europe published a stream of impressions on the miserable conditions of workers, repressions of socialists, and privileges of the Communists.⁶⁶

Most people in the delegation of the German USPD party were not interested in hearing what Martov or Chernov had to say either. Only Arthur Crispien met with Martov, who confirmed his reservations about Lenin's socialism.⁶⁷ He left Russia determined to fight against the USPD's proposed affiliation with the Third International and found a valuable ally in Martov. It was during these summer meetings that Martov was invited to come to Germany and address personally the crucial congress of the USPD in Halle in the fall. Well ahead of time, in July, Martov applied for a visa to go to Germany. According to some reports, the question as to whether to grant him a visa was debated in the Politburo and it was Lenin who finally swayed his colleagues to

⁶⁴ Details are in R. A. Abramovich to P. B. Axelrod (22 July 1920), *ibid.*, series 16, box 45, folder 5.

⁶⁵ "Not Life but a Cemetery" (A report on Bolshevik Russia by the Czechoslovak Labor delegation), *Information Bulletin*, no. 27 (5 March 1921), 10–11.

⁶⁶ See, for example, "Le Bolchevisme vu par les Italiens. Précieux Témoignages," *Les Informations Démocratique Russes Bulletin*, no. 22 (July 1920), 1.

⁶⁷ Iu. O. Martov to P. B. Axelrod (4 August 1920), Nicolaevsky Collection, series 17, box 51, folder 2.

let Martov go. A myth has been circulating ever since that Lenin made this decision because he loved Martov and cared about his security. Whatever his feelings for Martov were, Lenin was guided not by those but by reason. To deny Martov a visa would only have confirmed Menshevik allegations about the dictatorial nature of Bolshevism. Moreover, Lenin must have realized that Martov sent out all the information he needed to send with foreign visitors, whom the Cheka did not dare to search. They did search Martov's apartment though.⁶⁸

The Bolsheviks chose another tactic: they would present their argument with the Mensheviks to the German Social Democrats as a normal disagreement between the two working class parties in Russia, the Bolsheviks portraying themselves as a more revolutionary and more proletarian party than the Mensheviks, who, according to the Bolsheviks, were willing to cooperate with the bourgeoisie. This reasoning would be understandable to the USPD labor leaders, who considered themselves more revolutionary than the mainstream Social Democratic party of Germany (SPD). That was the tone of Zinoviev's speech in Halle. As Martov recounted the horrors of the Red Terror in 1918, the persecution of socialists now in prisons and concentration camps, the expulsions of deputies from the soviets, and the suppression of independent trade unions, indignant German union leaders shouted "shame" at Zinoviev.⁶⁹ Martov's condemnation of the Bolshevik regime was as forceful as it would have been if it had been presented by a Right Menshevik: "The system of terror is not limited to mass executions only. Bans on the press and assembly, mass arrests, forced labor without trial, which is an everyday punishment for strikes, a prohibition against workers' electing members of certain parties to the soviets, and exile to the front line for criticism of leaders—all this is recognized by the leaders of the Third International as an admissible system of government!"⁷⁰ Martov's speech produced an enormous impression and was published and republished in numerous newspapers all over Europe. Articles and interviews were solicited one after another.⁷¹ Like-minded Social Democrats offered assistance in setting up the Russian Social Democratic journal in exile, which indeed started to come out in February 1921. The information the Mensheviks and SRs provided to their European colleagues had an important impact on the development of these parties. Some of the cooler heads in the Western Socialist and SD parties toned down their veneration of the country of the victorious proletariat and refrained from joining the Third International. The USPD split. Lenin's attempt to bring the entire USPD into the Communist fold failed.

⁶⁸ Iu. O. Martov to P. B. Axelrod (29 September 1920), *ibid.*

⁶⁹ Iu. O. Martov to P. B. Axelrod (17 October 1920), *ibid.*

⁷⁰ "Rech' Martova," *Volia Rossii* (21–28 October 1920), here cited from 22 October 1920.

⁷¹ See, for example, proceedings of Martov's and Abramovich's meeting with the leadership of the USPD and Berlin trade unionists, "Russlands Gegenwart und Zukunft," *Freiheit*, no. 499 (25 November 1920), 1.

The Cheka Assault on the Opposition Parties

As this struggle for the hearts and minds of European socialists was unfolding, the Cheka in Russia was unleashed against the Mensheviks and SRs. On 24 August the Cheka seized O. A. Ermansky, A. A. Pleskov, and A. A. Troianovsky, all of them Menshevik Central Committee members.⁷² As Boris Skomorovsky, the CC secretary, described to Axelrod: "During the night on 23 August, as I was leaving the CC premises with all kinds of party documents from the back exit, the Cheka men were entering through the front. They left an ambush on our premises and stayed there for a week and seized fifty people."⁷³

On 20 August the entire all-Russian Menshevik conference was arrested as soon as it assembled in Moscow. A week earlier the Menshevik party conference of Ukraine had been arrested in Kharkov, a total of 120 people. Arrests also hit some factories and plants. Forty workers were arrested at the Bogatyr' factory in Moscow. The number of those arrested in Moscow alone reached several hundred.⁷⁴ Scores of leading Mensheviks in Petrograd were arrested as well. The Petrograd Cheka gleefully reported that the "Mensheviks became quiet after these arrests."⁷⁵ In October and November the Bolshevik authorities began to arrest entire local Menshevik party committees, often relying on election lists made public during the election campaigns. Twenty SDs were arrested in Mogilev, 20 in Samara, 12 in Vitebsk, and unknown numbers in Kursk, Nizhni Novgorod, Sormovo, Vologda, and Bryansk.⁷⁶ For the first time the Communists resorted to the forcible exile of opposition leaders abroad. Several leading Menshevik politicians in Ukraine were exiled to Georgia.⁷⁷ Martov wrote to Axelrod in September that his sources among high-ranking Bolsheviks informed him that a political trial of the Menshevik party was being prepared. He repeated this in another letter as something quite certain.⁷⁸ A complete list of all those arrested or taken hostage would have filled many pages. According to Chernov, during the summer of 1920 alone over 2000 Mensheviks and SRs were seized by the Cheka.⁷⁹ Not only were Central Committee members and

⁷² Iu. O. Martov to P. B. Axelrod (23 October 1920), Nicolaevsky Collection, series 17, box 51, folder 2.

⁷³ B. Skomorovsky to P. B. Axelrod (3 September 1920), Axelrod Archive.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ "Informatsionnaia svodka sekret'nogo otdela VeCheKa," Ts.G.A.O.R., Fond 130, SNK, Opis' 3, document 414(2), p. 67.

⁷⁶ Iu. O. Martov, untitled (December 1920), Nicolaevsky Collection, series 17, box 51, folder 13–14.

⁷⁷ Iu. O. Martov to P. B. Axelrod (20 December 1920), *ibid.*, folder 2.

⁷⁸ Iu. O. Martov to A. N. Stein (28 September 1920), *ibid.*, folder 4.

⁷⁹ "Chernov o sovremennom polozhenii," *Volia Rossii*, no. 20 (5 October 1920).

prominent politicians seized but their wives and relatives as well. Many of the arrested SRs had been imprisoned under the Kolchak regime as well, such as D. F. Rakov and A. T. Kuznetsov (whose wife was flogged by the Cheka). By the terms of the agreement signed in Ufa in 1919, the SRs could not be tried for acts committed prior to the agreement. And yet many arrested SRs were charged with supporting the Committee of the Constituent Assembly in 1918, and one V. G. Shmerling was charged with defending the Kremlin in 1917 during the Bolshevik seizure of power.⁸⁰ The lawless arrests of socialists and workers in the summer of 1920 suggest that without bothering to pronounce these parties banned, the Cheka began to hunt down Social Democrats and Socialist Revolutionaries not for any particular crime but simply for being what they were.

Obviously the overall direction of Soviet policy toward opposition parties was determined by Lenin. He received a monthly report from Dzerzhinsky on the activity of opposition parties. The very structure of these reports suggests that the Cheka had a fairly free hand in dealing with the opposition. The reports consisted of brief listings of what constituted "counterrevolutionary activity," such as spreading leaflets or addressing peasants or inciting workers to strike, followed by "measures undertaken." These entries usually included such measures as "taken under surveillance," or arrested or deported, or taken hostage. Since these reports were top secret documents, the Bolsheviks were quite frank about their policies. Exactly at the time when Lenin was lying to the Second Congress of the Communist International that all socialist parties in Soviet Russia were legal, the Cheka reports to Lenin cited arrests, the taking of hostages, and infiltrations by agents provocateurs as matters of routine practice.

Cheka methods were much more refined than a mere reliance on arrests or seizures of hostages and executions. The latter were only the more visible elements in the Cheka campaign to divide, intimidate, and ultimately destroy opposition parties. The Cheka always found a way to circumvent restrictions imposed on it. For example, when the death penalty was officially abolished in February 1920, the Cheka used the night before the publication of the decree to conduct mass executions of political prisoners. According to the collective testimony of prisoners in the Butyrki jail, that night alone seventy-two people were executed, and in Saratov prison fifty-two.⁸¹ The Cheka recommended to local departments that those to be shot should be transferred to the frontline zone, where the abolition of the death penalty was not in effect.⁸² A top secret letter of the All-Russian Cheka to local Chekas characterized the activity and evaluated the potential political strength of all opposition parties.⁸³ They were

⁸⁰ For details of these cases, see "Iz Sovetskogo zastenka," *Volia Rossii* (16 December 1920), 1.

⁸¹ "Terrorizm i Sovetskaia vlast'," *Volia Rossii* (12 November 1920), 1.

⁸² Cheka document dated 15 April 1920 and reproduced in "Terrorizm i Sovetskaia vlast'," *Volia Rossii* (12 November 1920), 1.

⁸³ "Tsirkuliarnoe pis'mo Vecheka" (1 July 1920), Nicolaevsky Collection, series 89, box 143, folder 5.

all dangerous because, "exhausted and lacking political consciousness, the worker and peasant begins to express his discontent, since his material situation has not improved. He expresses this discontent in strikes and even in uprisings."⁸⁴ Publicly the Communist press accused the opposition parties of organizing uprisings. In this internal circular, however, the Cheka admitted that it was workers and peasants who expressed discontent in strikes and uprisings. Hence measures had to be taken to prevent the parties from leading this protest movement. The problem with the Mensheviks, the Cheka explained, was that after their legalization in 1919 they managed to cover "almost all of Russia with their organizations." The Mensheviks were trying to establish a foothold in trade unions and other workers' organizations. For tactical considerations, the Cheka explained, the legal status of the Mensheviks would be preserved, but local Chekas were to pay attention to Menshevik activities and take appropriate measures.⁸⁵ Another method was described in this way: "Summarizing the above, the Secret Department suggests that the local secret departments pay particular attention to the subversive activity of the Mensheviks who work in cooperatives and trade unions, particularly among the printers. The secret departments must thoroughly collect incriminating material and try the Mensheviks not as Mensheviks but as speculators, inciters of strikes, etc."⁸⁶

The letter spoke with alarm about the Socialists Revolutionaries, who, despite all obstacles, retained numerous local organizations. The Cheka was particularly worried by the SR Central Committee decision of May 1920 to organize peasant unions in the provinces which would be able to defend the peasants' economic interests in the food supply. Local Chekas were instructed to keep a close watch over all SRs, especially those arriving in the provinces from the capital, and "by decisive measures isolate the organizational capacity of the SR leaders." For this purpose, the instructions went on, it was essential to create a well-functioning apparatus of information gathering. "It is necessary to improve this apparatus and by all means available to attract new informers [*osvedomiteli*] without being timid with the expenditure of money."⁸⁷

Infiltrating political parties was a tested method of the Cheka. Provincial Cheka reports routinely cite their reliance on agents provocateurs. For example, thanks to a valuable tip of an agent planted in the Left SR organization in Tula Province, the Cheka boasted that it had discovered a machine gun and a bomb buried in a village.⁸⁸ The group most seriously affected by this method was the Narod breakaway faction of the SR party. As early as January 1920, that is, barely two months after the Narod faction split from the PSR, the Cheka

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 1.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 23.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 25.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 22.

⁸⁸ "Informatsionnaia svodka sekretnogo otdela Vecheka, Politicheskie partii i grupy" (30 October 1920), Ts.G.A.O.R., Fond 130, SNK, Opis' 3, document 414(3).

informed Kamenev that its agents had infiltrated the Narod group "with the purpose of information gathering and disruption of its work."⁸⁹ Cheka agents provocateurs compiled lists of oppositionists, most of whom disappeared into camps later on. Details of this operation are known largely thanks to the confessions of N. A. Bespalov, who published in 1924 his story of collaboration with the Cheka. By a threat that his wife would be executed and he charged with treason, he was forced to cooperate. His job was to leak information on the Narod faction's activities and membership. To enhance his stature, the Cheka created a fake local Narod organization staffed with Cheka special agents. The ultimate goal was to expose and extract real oppositionists and to destroy the Narod faction.⁹⁰

The Cheka was particularly concerned about leaders. As master organizers themselves, the Bolsheviks realized that without organization any protest movement would have little chance of success. Hence their top priority was to extract all important leaders in the opposition parties. The arrest of the all-Russian and Ukrainian Menshevik party conferences effectively extracted all prominent national leaders of that party. By the end of the summer in 1920 most members of the SR Central Committee were in prison too. Yet there still remained thousands of opposition party members at liberty, most of them working in key Soviet economic institutions. The Cheka's purpose was to identify and extract those who showed signs of active involvement in politics. To accomplish this task, the Cheka resorted to several methods.

In the spring of 1920 an old-time member of the SR party named Davydov was invited to come by the Cheka for a chat. They told him it was unfortunate that now, at a time when Polish landlords and capitalists had attacked Soviet Russia, the party of Socialist Revolutionaries was waging a struggle against Soviet power. Davydov responded that it was a well-known fact that the PSR had ceased armed struggle against Soviet Power a long time earlier.⁹¹ The Cheka officer suggested that perhaps Davydov could meet with Chernov and convey to him that Soviet authorities had nothing against the legal and peaceful work of the SR party. Davydov was advised to raise the question of improving relations between the PSR and the RCP among the SR party members. For this purpose, he was told, the Soviet authorities would put no obstacles in the way of convening an SR party conference. Naturally Davydov wanted to do what he could for his party, so he contacted party colleagues, conveying to them what he had heard from the Cheka. Every single person Davydov contacted was arrested without any charges or explanation. Seven hundred SRs were arrested as a result of that friendly chat.

Still, these were people rooted out by chance. Dzerzhinsky wanted to orga-

⁸⁹ "Tovarishchu Kamenevu ot Zav. Sekretnym Otdelom" (14 January 1920), Ts.P.A., Fond 17, TsKa RKP(b), Opis' 84, document 43.

⁹⁰ "Iz nedr Bol'shevistskoi okhranki," *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 35-36 (1925), 8-10.

⁹¹ Tschernow [Chernov], *Meine Schicksalle in Sowjet Russland*, p. 48.

nize the extraction of SRs systematically so that no one could escape. In a memorandum to V. R. Menzhinsky he proposed: "I believe we ought to ask the Secret Department [*sekretnyi otdel*] or someone else personally to make up cards for all the persons mentioned in the protocols and in the correspondence of the PSR Central Committee. The cards should contain the following information: first and last name, a note on what is being said about him and in what context, indicating when he attended the Central Committee meeting. This card file will make it possible to know who among them is already arrested and whom we should still seek, etc."⁹²

But this was only the beginning. Among other measures Dzerzhinsky proposed was drafting a list of the SRs who had been elected to the First Congress of Soviets in June 1917 and all SRs who had been elected to public office, including the soviets in Petrograd, Moscow, and all other cities, in order to extract them.⁹³ In other words Dzerzhinsky wanted to arrest all SRs who had been elected, even those elected before the Bolsheviks seized power, without knowing what they were doing at present. Their guilt or lack thereof was of no consequence. They had to be removed because they used to belong or still belonged to a certain political party.

In a letter to Axelrod, Abramovich expressed the view that the Communists were deliberately parading their arbitrariness so that some oppositionists would abandon political activity and others resort to revolutionary struggle. Then they could be crushed as terrorists and spies.⁹⁴ To judge by the Cheka's actions, that may well have been its intention. Some oppositionists were intimidated and did drop out of politics. Others indeed went underground, especially the Left SRs. Others defected to the Bolsheviks. Many of these used to be Right Mensheviks, like Ivan Maisky or Andrei Vyshinsky. Most likely they figured that just two options were left open: either to remain in an opposition party and end up in Siberia eventually, or to join the Bolsheviks and serve them loyally. Then, who knows? Career opportunities might not be closed. The Cheka's favorite approach to turncoats from other parties was to offer them a chance to become informers, infiltrators, and agents provocateurs. In an internal Cheka communication agent Braude described her efforts to recruit informers from among the SR prisoners in the Butyrki jail.⁹⁵ Some of those turncoats were eager to serve their new masters. In another memo Dzerzhinsky wrote that some former SRs offered their services to the Cheka to assassinate B. V. Savinkov, a former terrorist and an ardent opponent of the Bolsheviks who had been expelled from the SR party in 1917. Dzerzhinsky decided against assassinating Savinkov

⁹² Dzerzhinsky to Menzhinsky (20 April 1920), Ts.P.A., Dzerzhinsky Archive, Fond 76, Opis' 3, document 49.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Raphael Abramovich to P. B. Axelrod (30 May 1920), Axelrod Archive.

⁹⁵ "Ot sotrudnika poruchenii sekretnogo otdela VeCheKa Braude: Raport," Ts.P.A., Dzerzhinsky Archive, Fond 76, Opis' 3, document 49, p. 45.

because "they might start shooting our comrades" in retribution.⁹⁶ However, continued Dzerzhinsky, it is necessary to use these people in order to establish surveillance over Chernov, V. M. Zenzinov, and other SR leaders. "Let them go through the filter and be sent abroad," concluded Dzerzhinsky.

In addition to infiltration, intimidation, mass arrests, and intrigue, the Cheka promoted factional division among opposition parties. One of the methods recommended for undermining the Menshevik party was promoting discord among Menshevik factions by inviting the left-wingers to participate in the festivities of the October revolution anniversary. As soon as the Cheka found out that in a Menshevik or SR or Left SR party serious disagreements had arisen, as during the offensive of General Denikin in the fall of 1919, it would bestow all kinds of favors on the faction favoring compromise with the Bolsheviks. They would be allowed to publish a newspaper and hold conferences, and the pages of *Izvestiia* would be open for them, all in the hope that members of the opposition party in question would be tempted to join the dissident group in order to be able to live and work in peace without harassment.⁹⁷ Anyone craving political activity, it was hoped, would rather be a member of a tolerated party, have an opportunity to be elected to the soviet, publish articles and interviews, and identify his party affiliation openly. The Narod group was favored over the mainstream SRs, Martov's Mensheviks over the Right Mensheviks, and Steinberg's followers in the Left SR party over Spiridonova's Left SRs. In each case the Cheka method was to induce the parties to participate in their own destruction. The Cheka strove to split large opposition parties into meaningless pieces. Usually the honeymoon with the new party did not last long. Once it was over, that party would be subjected to the same kind of persecution as the old mother party. Yet the bad relations between the old factions of the formerly large party would linger and make their joint activity difficult. The Narod group and the mainstream SRs had no matters of principle on which they disagreed in 1920, yet the return of the dissidents into the mainstream SR party was difficult and painful. The Right and Center-Left Mensheviks never resolved their differences. And as late as the 1960s in New York they continued their acrimonious debates.

The Cheka tried the same approach of divide and conquer in regard to the Left SR party. The faction led by Isaak Steinberg was to be tolerated for the time being, but the faction led by Mariia Spiridonova was to be suppressed. A classified letter to the local Chekas referred to Spiridonova in this way: "If we take into consideration that Spiridonova enjoys popularity among the petite bourgeoisie [i.e., peasants], who are inclined to greet with jubilation any manifestation of opposition against Soviet power, it will then become clear that with

⁹⁶ Dzerzhinsky to Kh.G. (19 January 1921), Ts.P.A., Dzerzhinsky Archive, Fond 76, Opis' 3, document 49, p. 32.

⁹⁷ Viktor Chernov, "Ikh taktika," *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 3 (February 1921), 3-4.

this group of Left SRs we must conduct energetic struggle.”⁹⁸ The Cheka recommended that all arrested Left SRs be dispatched to Moscow, where “we will extract from them maximum use, and as happened before, we will acquire valuable personnel for the Cheka from among them.”⁹⁹ Since some Left SRs were connected with the peasant rebels, it was imperative to “put an end to these socialist bandits once and for all.” Everyone had his fate assigned. Some were to be watched, others turned into informers, and still others finished off.

As engineers of social relations the Bolsheviks realized that arresting all the members of all opposition parties would not remove the political and social grievances those parties articulated. There could always appear new people who would dare to articulate those concerns. Instead of banning the opposition parties outright, it was much more convenient to preserve their semilegal status and extract troublemakers as soon as they showed up. The All-Russian Cheka left no doubt as to what the ultimate aim of its policy was: “in regard to the anti-Soviet political parties it is necessary to use the war situation and charge members of these parties with crimes such as speculation, counterrevolutionary activity, and abuse of authority, which undermine the rear, harm the war effort, and express solidarity with the Allies and their agents.”¹⁰⁰

So many familiar Soviet traditions are recognizable in this remarkable document. The individual guilt of a person did not matter. Instruction from Moscow determined what categories of crimes were going to be invented to get rid of undesirable people. In a secret circular to party comrades, the Communist bosses did not hide the fact that *wreckers*, *enemies*, and *spies* were code words for critics, strikers, and opposition party politicians. The explicit purpose of this policy was to remove from a community all political leaders. The message to an individual was unambiguous: do not get involved in politics, be obedient, and take whatever comes, or else you’ll wind up in a concentration camp as a speculator or wrecker. Whatever the critics of Hannah Arendt have argued against her theory of totalitarianism, her concept of the atomization of society is well illustrated by this explicitly stated Cheka policy document.

Up to November 1920 the above-mentioned Cheka practices—infiltrating parties with agents provocateurs, seizing hostages, arbitrary arrests, exiles, and deportations—were part of a covert Cheka operation. Officially political parties remained legal in Soviet Russia for tactical considerations, as the Cheka letter explained. In November 1920, however, this pretence was cast aside. Undisguised war was declared on the opposition parties. The Cheka published openly a policy statement which said that arrested members of the opposition parties’ Central Committees would be considered hostages and that their fate would depend on the political behavior of the rank and file in those parties. A

⁹⁸ “Tsirkuliarnoe pis'mo Vecheka no. 5” (1 July 1920), Nicolaevsky Collection, series 89, box 143, folder 5, p. 15.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 15

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 25

government agency whose official role was to investigate crimes was publicly stating that the fate of people in its custody would depend on the actions of others in the future. Most likely this escalation of repressions, especially against SRs and Left SRs, was connected to the rising tide of peasant war against the Bolsheviks in the fall of 1920. Dzerzhinsky was genuinely worried lest the organizational capacity of the SRs and Left SRs channel peasant upheaval into an avalanche which would sweep away the Bolsheviks. To his deputy, he wrote: "Among the SRs there is great excitement now. They are collecting their forces. They hope that in spring power will fall into their hands like a ripe fruit."¹⁰¹

The significance of the Bolshevik decision to take hostages has been completely overlooked by proponents of the "good Lenin, bad Stalin" myth. This represents much more than an embryo of full-fledged totalitarianism, which some scholars have denied ever existed under Lenin. This reveals that the very essence of Bolshevik political culture goes back to its underground past. The Bolsheviks, in power, used conspiratorial and terrorist methods to settle scores with their rivals or opponents. The Bolsheviks acted as a private organization which happened to control the instruments of state power. Why is it so surprising that a faction within the ruling clique would use the same methods and dispose of its perceived rivals by state coercion a few years later?

One may conclude that the Communist policy toward opposition parties consisted of two levels: one of abstract law and propaganda for foreign consumption, and the other of practical policy. On the first level political parties were legal, and they peacefully competed for political power in the soviets. On the second level the Cheka, as a private arm of a terrorist party in power, waged a skillful and covert war outside the law against opposition parties. In that war the Cheka was largely successful in weakening the capacity of opposition parties to organize and lead a popular movement. At it turned out, however, destroying political parties was an easier task than controlling and containing the workers' and especially peasants' protest movements.

¹⁰¹ Dzerzhinsky to Kh.G. (19 January 1921), Ts.P.A., Dzerzhinsky Archive, Fond 76, Opis' 3, document 49.

Workers under Militarized Labor

Theater of the Absurd

Life in a Soviet city of 1920 can be compared to the theater of the absurd. There were two worlds: one was the ideal and the other real. In the ideal world reality was presented as if it were what it was supposed to be, as imagined by the Communist leaders. Newspapers reported on the heroic work of labor collectives and new victories on the external and internal fronts against the bourgeoisie and kulaks and wreckers and all the other enemies of Soviet power. Congresses were held celebrating the coming of the world proletarian revolution. Foreign delegations were shown the achievements of socialist construction. Concerts and street shows, staged for the hungry masses, depicted caricatures of fat capitalists and heroic Communist workers. Propaganda trains crisscrossed the country, announcing the dawn of the new era of liberated labor.

In the real world factories were mostly idle, railroads barely functioned, tramlines stood still, and electricity was supplied only to party and government agencies. Water and sewage services did not function, and food rations were sinking below subsistence level by the fall of 1920. When the cold weather set in, furniture became the only source of heating for many.¹ Cheka detachments systematically raided the markets to fight "food speculation" and helped themselves to confiscated goods in the process. As foreign observers reported: "life in the cities is affected by absolute moral and material misery."²

Society, in the Russia of 1920, was in flux. It was a quicksand society. Peasants were running away from labor obligations and grain requisitions to the Green bands in the forests. Like the workers, they were conscripted for all kinds of labor obligations and were left with essentially a subsistence-level food allotment. Other peasants were abandoning their ruined villages altogether and moving in search of food and land to Siberia. Workers in a counterstream were trying to escape their miserable condition by seeking refuge in the villages. Conscripted peasants took their place on the factory floor. Boundaries between

¹ "Pis'mo iz Kharkova," *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 2 (January 1921).

² This was the conclusion of the American Economic Section, which studied the report of the Italian Labor Delegation to Russia and sent a copy to the Department of State from Rome. The American report was dated 14 November 1920, Records, dispatch 681.00.7707.

producing groups of the population were increasingly erased. The intelligentsia were starving in the cold and empty cities, trying to survive as best they could by seeking employment in Bolshevik bureaucracies. Countless others, hundreds of thousands, emigrated abroad. Many people, it seems, were trying to escape contact with the Communist order by physically moving somewhere else. All that of course only added to the chaos and disruption, the lack of specialists, lack of skilled workers, lack of locomotives, lack of energy, lack of just about everything—a familiar feature of Soviet reality. Society in its former sense ceased to exist. Political parties and social groups were divided from one another and from within: masses from the parties, factions from other factions within opposition parties, workers from peasants, peasants in one area from peasants in another. It was a splintered and broken society. In fact the very word *society* is hardly appropriate here. It was a conglomeration of regions and groups and individuals whose bonds of common identity and beliefs had been broken. A profound downward mobility for the majority of people in Russia had taken place as well as a profound primitivization of life and social relations.

By the fall of 1920 most potential leaders of the community had been extracted by the Cheka, and the opposition parties had been virtually decimated. In February 1921 the workers and peasants and sailors who rebelled against the Communists were essentially leaderless. The Left SRs led by Maria Spiridonova had been driven underground but vowed to continue organizing peasant resistance, including popular uprisings, despite the terror. Most Menshevik and SR Central Committee members were in prison, held as hostages. Fall 1920 was a season of growing worker anti-Bolshevik radicalism despite Menshevik warnings. It was a time of sporadic mutinies in the Red Army and Navy, and above all a new stage in the peasant war against the Communists.

Essentially two categories of people were left in the Russia of 1920: those who produced and those who collected and distributed that which had been produced. The Communists were certainly not a political party anymore but a conglomeration of bureaucracies and mobilization agencies. Theft, corruption, and profiteering by Communist functionaries went hand in hand with speeches and marches celebrating socialist construction. Lunacharsky reported to Lenin that a majority of cases in the Nikolayev and Odessa Cheka involved misdeeds of the Communist party administration.³ And yet Lunacharsky himself kept on giving speeches on the achievements of Soviet power. The leaders of the Communist state knew very well that the real world was drastically different from the one they painted in their own speeches. Lunacharsky wrote to Lenin that Odessa, Nikolayev, and most other Ukrainian cities were “anti-Soviet,” that a majority of the population there detested Bolshevik rule, and that even workers suffered under Soviet power because due to some unexplain-

³ “Doklad Lunacharskogo Leninu ob obshchem polozhenii Nikolaevskoi i Odesskoi gubernii,” *Literaturnoe Nasledstvo*, vol. 80, p. 460.

able reasons as soon as Soviet power was established, bread prices went up. Lenin, Trotsky, Lunacharsky, and others were under no illusion that the majority of the population, urban and rural, was against them, that Communist administration was corrupt and in many cases downright criminal, and that worsening, not improving, economic conditions were associated with Soviet power.

The worse the moral and physical degradation of urban life became, the more the Communists shouted about victories over internal and external enemies and about strengthening vigilance. Intrigues of the capitalists, lack of political consciousness among the masses, conspiracies of the Mensheviks and SRs—all were to blame for “temporary difficulties,” but not the Communists or their policies. The party could not be wrong, because the vanguard of the working class could not be wrong. By definition whatever was wrong was done by the enemies of the working class. Writing to a friend in a personal letter not intended for publication, Martov remarked: “The atmosphere, as I said, is stifling. It is so dull with no strong sensations at all, except that now and then they begin all over again, their monotonous baiting of the Mensheviks accompanied by threatening catcalls. But even these manifestations of hysteria are becoming trite, devoid of enthusiasm, and failing to evoke responses even in the Bolshevik masses. A profound stagnation of thought pervades Bolshevism.”⁴

An important aspect of Soviet political culture developed at that time: pretending that life was a procession from one victory to another along the path of socialist construction and blaming hidden enemies and conspirators for “temporary difficulties.” This political culture of what we call the theater of the absurd, presenting the ideal visions as if they were reality, outlived Lenin and Stalin by several more decades. It became a permanent feature of Soviet life.

The Militarization of Labor

The militarization of labor in 1920 is usually regarded as a passing episode in Soviet history. Once War Communism was abandoned in 1921, gone was the militarization of labor as well. It is seen as a temporary aberration in the Bolsheviks’ search for a path to socialism. In fact this was not the case. At the time of its adoption the militarization of labor was thought of as the only correct Marxist method of industrialization. Not just Trotsky but the Communist opposition as well accepted the principle of the militarization of labor. Even though the most odious attributes of this militarization, such as fixing workers to their plants and instituting a food rations hierarchy, were dropped under the NEP, many beliefs, values, and identities associated with the militar-

⁴ Iu. O. Martov to S. D. Shchupak (26 June 1920). The original is in the Nicolaevsky Collection, series 21, box 60, folder 1, reprinted in English in Brovkin, ed., *Dear Comrades*, p. 211.

ization of labor became permanent attributes of the Communist social order. The Communists' perception of workers as objects of state action to be mobilized, shaped, purged, indoctrinated (called politically educated), and disciplined (i.e., punished) lasted over seven decades.

It is indisputable that the militarization of labor is associated with the name of Trotsky.⁵ In a number of articles in late 1919 and early 1920 Trotsky elaborated his ideas on the socialist organization of industry. He presented them most fully in his report to the Ninth Party Congress in March 1920. Trotsky started with the general premise that a human being is essentially a lazy being and his natural desire is to avoid work.⁶ Under all systems, however, there are forces that make him work. Under capitalism, argued Trotsky, workers have to seek employment to survive and move from one place to another depending on the availability of labor, dictated by the market. The capitalist market fulfills the function of compulsion. Trotsky saw the greatest achievement of the Bolshevik revolution in the destruction of the market.⁷ Under the socialist organization of industry the state plan "of utilization of labor resources replaced the market." From here it followed that the state had inherited the function of compulsion and had the right to direct labor resources where it needed them. That is why workers had to be fixed to the plants and not allowed to wander around Russia in search of work. "The labor force is distributed in accordance with the economic plan. . . . It [labor] must be appointed, rerouted, and dispatched exactly in the same fashion as soldiers are. That is the foundation of militarized labor."⁸ According to Trotsky, socialism was a form of production superior to capitalism because a comprehensive state plan replaced the chaos of the market. In labor relations socialism was superior because state coercion replaced coercion by the market. Since the state was a workers' and socialist state, its compulsion of the workers should not be feared, because in the end it had the workers' best interests in mind.

Trotsky's critics, such as Aleksei Rykov, Gol'tsman, and others, feared that labor under compulsion was not going to be as productive as free labor, an observation that seems axiomatic. But not to Trotsky. He argued exactly the opposite. "We say it is untrue that compulsory labor is unproductive under all conditions."⁹ It could be very productive indeed if the workers understood that what they were building was a superior form of society, a socialist state. The purpose of the party was to educate the workers that work under compulsion was something they had to accept voluntarily and joyfully. Incentives and repressive

⁵ See, for example, such key documents as "Khoziaistvennoe polozhenie respubliki i osnovnye zadachi vosstanovleniia promyshlennosti" (January 1920), pp. 27–52, and "Mobilizatsiia truda, doklad na tret'em s'ezde sovnrarkhozov," pp. 52–55, in L. Trotsky, *Sochineniia*, vol. 19 (1927).

⁶ *Deviatyi s'ezd RKP(b). Protokoly*, p. 93.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

measures were to be combined in order to teach the workers what was in their best interest.

One should be thankful to Trotsky for expressing the essence of the totalitarian idea so succinctly and so openly in March 1920. Trotsky argued that the best model to use in implementing labor compulsion was the army: "In the military sphere there exists a corresponding apparatus which is activated for the purpose of compelling the soldiers to fulfill their duties. In this or that form it must be created also in the labor sphere."¹⁰ So industry should be run from a single headquarters like the army; the construction of socialism should proceed according to a general plan like a military campaign, and workers should be utilized by the headquarters just as soldiers are in war. He envisioned creating territorial labor armies whose headquarters would administer economic activity in large economic regions of the country. The brave new world of Communist labor would look like this: "Our armies will be recast to fulfill labor needs. Labor specialists will replace military specialists at the top. . . . Operations headquarters will send out orders to the labor front: to chop wood, harvest grain, and repair locomotives. The Mobilization Directorate will compile lists of all capable and experienced specialists. And every evening thousands of telephones will ring at the army headquarters reporting conquests on the labor front."¹¹ Trotsky tried to implement this system in the Urals, where the Third Army was converted into the First Labor Army. Workers received a soldiers' ration, and military discipline was introduced.¹² Conscripted soldiers were assigned to the labor front, and industrial workers were turned into soldiers. The difference between them was erased.

The creation of labor armies may be seen as an extension of the Bolshevik policy of total mobilization of human and economic resources for war.¹³ The external front of the civil war against the Whites found its counterpart in the internal labor front. The problem with this explanation is that the labor armies were created after the decisive victories over the Whites and partly in response to the new situation arising from these victories. Labor armies made it possible to utilize redundant soldiers after the defeat of Kolchak. Soldiers as workers and workers as soldiers did not have to be aroused for heroic tasks by Trotsky's oratory. They had to fulfill orders. The Bolsheviks had always displayed a utilitarian approach to what they called the masses, who were to be shown the correct path. In 1917 Trotsky did it by fiery speeches and inflammatory rhetoric; in 1920 there was a shortcut, state coercion.

But what about agriculture and peasants? Trotsky suggested that the peasantry be militarized too, and here the experience of Red Army building was most

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 93.

¹¹ "Krasnaia armia—armia truda," *Krasnoarmeets*, no. 16–20 (February 1920), 8.

¹² Trotsky to comrade Skliansky for comrade Lenin (Ekaterinburg, 27 February 1920), *Trotsky Papers*, vol. 2, document 482, p. 77.

¹³ "L'Armée du travail," *La République Russe*, no. 7 (1 April 1920), 3.

relevant. He boasted that out of "muzhik raw material" (*muzhitskoe sy'rie*) he had built a victorious Red Army. The same method should now be used to engage peasants in state-supervised labor through the institution of universal labor conscription. City workers should be used by the party to militarize the peasant masses.¹⁴ To some these ideas may appear as incoherent fantasies impossible to implement. But in 1929 this is exactly what the party did by mobilizing and dispatching twenty-five thousand workers to the countryside with the explicit purpose of putting an end to free labor and setting up controlled and supervised peasant collectives instead. Trotsky was convinced that his vision of compulsory, state-supervised labor was superior and that every Communist knew it. "If coercion is inimical to productivity, then we are doomed to face economic decline, no matter what we do and no matter how we twist and turn."¹⁵ Here Trotsky proved to be prophetic. It is clear from his discourse that the creation of labor armies was more than a mere utilization of surplus soldiers after the defeat of Kolchak. Labor armies were an intrinsic component of Trotsky's plan of socialist construction. With minor differences in emphasis Lenin agreed with Trotsky's ideas. His own speeches of the time were full of demands to put an end to the collegial system of management and to institute strict one-man control. That idea went well with his advocacy of army methods.

The opposition to Trotsky's militarization schemes and Lenin's one-man rule came from two very different constituencies in the Communist party. One was led by the democratic centralists T. V. Saponov and N. Osinsky, people who had always been concerned with party democracy or at least democratic procedure.¹⁶ They were worried by two consequences of the militarization of labor. In Osinsky's words, "Complete militarization implies limitation of the civil liberties and political rights of the individual. It implies his enserfment in the production process."¹⁷ Osinsky's second concern was that army methods, if implemented in all spheres of politics and industry, would lead to the destruction of democracy in the party: "Under the cover of militarization you promote the rule of bureaucracy. And we do not want this."¹⁸ Saponov was even more explicit. If socialism, he argued, actually meant the dictatorship of appointed bureaucrats who fulfill orders, why then all this talk about the dictatorship of the proletariat, which supposedly exists; why then all this talk about workers' self-organization and independent activity [*samodeiatelnost*]? Saponov accused Lenin and his entourage of turning not only rank-and-file workers but party members as well into "an obedient gramophone" that only reproduced what had been prerecorded. What was being created, argued Saponov, was a

¹⁴ *Deviatyi s'ezd RKP(b). Protokoly*, p. 94.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

¹⁶ See Service, *The Bolshevik Party in Revolution*, pp. 142-45.

¹⁷ *Deviatyi s'ezd RKP(b). Protokoly*, p. 124.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

dictatorship of the bureaucracy, and a rule of oligarchy.¹⁹ Martov could not have put it better than Sapronov. As in the past, the concerns of some Bolsheviks echoed the concerns of the Mensheviks and SRs. The difference of course was that Sapronov, Osinsky, and others genuinely wished the Communist party to succeed in its endeavors. Some of Osinsky's and Sapronov's fears sounded prophetic in retrospect. "I would like to pose a question to comrade Lenin. And who is going to appoint the Central Committee? Oh, yes, here we have one-man rule as well! Here too one ruler is appointed! Hopefully we will not reach that stage, but if we do, the revolution will be lost."²⁰

The only institutional grouping within the CP that supported Sapronov and Osinsky were the trade unionists. These were the people who later in 1920 would form a workers' opposition and launch a trade union debate that almost split the Communist party by March 1921. The unionists were concerned with the fate of the unions and by implication with the rights of workers. They feared Trotsky's appointed commanders and political departments, and their speeches betrayed concern over their own future role. Most of them had nothing against Trotsky's idea of a centralized plan of economic development or against the idea of a general headquarters for industry. It is just that they wanted to be the headquarters and draft the plans. These people had nothing against labor armies either and approved their creation. Neither did they protest the militarization of labor in principle. They objected only to its introduction everywhere immediately.

The term *workers' opposition*, which they later chose, does not actually depict the true colors of that opposition. In fact these people had little to do with workers. Their "opposition" was a voice of the trade union bureaucracy concerned over its fair share of commanding posts and worried about a possible usurpation of those posts by Trotsky's political departments. Politics inside the Communist party were increasingly becoming the politics of interest groups and cliques dividing up power and access to privilege. The voices of Osinsky and Sapronov in 1920 sound like voices from the past, when people were motivated not by institutional interests but by the principles they believed in.

Despite the resistance of some Communists at the Ninth Party Congress, the militarization of labor and the labor armies scheme were approved. Over two thousand enterprises were militarized.²¹ From then on workers had to fulfill orders and receive army rations. The factory was turned into a war zone. Production was defined as fighting on the industrial front. Party leaders thought of themselves as commanders of an army and of workers as soldiers. The very idea of a negotiated labor dispute became unacceptable. Soldiers do not negotiate but obey. The idea of a strike became synonymous with enemy attack, diversion, and sabotage that had to be crushed immediately. *Pravda* threatened: "those who are against labor conscription are labor deserters, supporters of

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 51–52 and 64.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 52.

²¹ Golub, *Revoliutsiia zashchishchaetsia*, p. 123.

speculation and economic disorder. Therefore they are enemies of the working class."²² According to Trotsky, 300,000 workers were listed as labor deserters in 1920 out of the total of 1,500,000 workers in the main branches of industry.²³ The new task of the trade unions, according to *Pravda*, was to ensure the fulfillment of labor conscription. "Cases of malicious sabotage on the part of workers, employees, or administration" they were to "pass on to the Cheka."²⁴ A special new bureaucracy was created to deal with labor desertion, and ever more stringent measures were adopted. The congress defined the task of the CP and of the trade unions as intensifying the struggle against labor desertion. "The way to fight against it is to publish a list of desertion fines, to create labor detachments of deserters under fine, and finally to intern deserters in a concentration camp."²⁵

In the course of 1920 the system of militarized labor developed overlapping levels of bureaucracies for inspecting, supervising, distributing and collecting. A great number of the people on a factory payroll were not workers at all. "In one factory there are 1,600 workmen on the payroll, but 600 of them are engaged in 'political work' and never show up except to draw their pay."²⁶ These bureaucracies drafted all kinds of rules and regulations defining the new social hierarchy and behavior norms in the workplace. It was specified what kind of breach of labor discipline would lead to what kind of punishment. A worker named Khronin, from Kostroma, described conditions at his factory: "Absolute submission to the director has been introduced at the works. Neither interference nor contradiction on the part of workers are tolerated."²⁷ A refusal to work overtime or a no-show at the workplace without permission from the foreman meant suspension of the food ration for a specific period. Persistent refusal led to trial and conviction. No wonder Putilov workers in Petrograd wrote in September 1920: "We feel as if we were in a forced labor camp where everything is regimented except food. We have lost ourselves as people. We have been turned into slaves."²⁸

²² "Rol' profsoiuzov v bor'be s trudovym dezertirstvom," *Pravda* (19 May 1920), 2.

²³ *Deviatyi s'ezd RKP(b). Protokoly*, p. 93.

²⁴ "Rol' profsoiuzov v bor'be s trudovym dezertirstvom," *Pravda* (19 May 1920), p. 2.

²⁵ *Deviatyi s'ezd RKP(b). Protokoly*, p. 415.

²⁶ Leslie A. Davies, American consul, "Confidential Report on Conditions in Russia" (12 May 1920). The consul added to his report a note: "The following information has been furnished by a British officer who has just come from Russia and I believe it is reliable." Records, dispatch 681.00.7031.

²⁷ Khronin, in *Metalist*, no. 13 (August 1920), cited here from George Strumilo (here spelled Strooomilo), "Russia and the Russian Workers under the Bolshevik Rule," *American Federationist*, vol. 28 (May 1921), p. 392. Strumilo was a Petrograd worker, a Menshevik. In 1918 he fled to the Urals and remained there in 1919 under the Whites. He was then elected as a member of the trade union delegation of the Urals Metal Union to be sent to the United States. When he arrived, the Kolchak regime did not exist anymore. He published numerous articles on the Red and White dictatorship in the Urals and Siberia in the Western trade union and labor press.

²⁸ Boris Sokolov, "Polozhenie proletariata v Sovetskoï Rossii," *Volia Rossii* (18 December 1920), 2.

The Workers' Economic Situation

The Bolsheviks' most powerful weapon over the hundreds of thousands of conscripted soldier-workers was their control over food distribution. In the near famine conditions of 1920 a food ration became a ticket for survival. Now the Bolsheviks were going to use this weapon with skill and refinement: increased rations to some, reduced rations to others, and no rations to still others created a new social hierarchy. Just as peasants in 1918 had been divided into social categories of rich and poor depending on their usefulness to the regime, workers in 1920 were divided into food ration categories depending on their usefulness for the immediate tasks of Soviet power. Lenin wrote quite frankly to Trotsky: "The individual bread ration is to be reduced for those not engaged in transport work and increased for those engaged in it. Let thousands more perish, but the country will be saved."²⁹ Shock enterprises of vital importance were placed in the first, or highest, food ration category. Usually these were munitions plants. Enterprises of less vital importance were placed into the second and third categories. By the end of 1920 eighteen different types of food rations existed.³⁰ A huge bureaucracy was hired to collect and distribute meager grams of bread and other necessities to hundreds of thousands of workers, who were completely at the mercy of those who distributed goods. In certain cases it was difficult to decide who and on what basis would receive, for example, a pair of boots.³¹ Of course the commanders deserved more than the soldiers.

This system of centralized distribution generated pervasive corruption early on. There are countless examples from various parts of the country to the effect that food or clothing which was supposed to be distributed to workers disappeared without a trace. Lunacharsky, among others, reported to Lenin about the daily theft of goods from warehouses.³² The All-Russian Cheka reported to Lenin that it had discovered "massive numbers of crimes such as abuse of authority and bribery for release from the draft in Kursk Province."³³ According to an American intelligence report on conditions at the Tula armaments plant, only 25 percent of workers received clothing sent to the plant for distribution, the remainder being given to the commissars.³⁴ One may dismiss such abuses of power as violations of socialist legality, as Lunacharsky did. But whether Lunacharsky realized this or not, these were not mere violations but the very essence of the Soviet order, because abuse of power was made possible by access

²⁹ Lenin to Trotsky (1 February 1920), *Trotsky Papers*, vol. 2, document 445, p. 22.

³⁰ "Interview du camarade Abramovitch," *La République Russe* (1 February 1920), 21–25.

³¹ "Rabochoia Zhizn'. Shkurniki," *Pravda* (16 December 1920), 2.

³² Lunacharsky to Lenin (26 February 1921), in *Literaturnoe Nasledstvo*, vol. 80, p. 253.

³³ "Informatsionnaia Svodka Vecheka" (1–15 July 1920), Ts.G.A.O.R., Fond 130, Opis' 3, document 414, p. 13.

³⁴ Office of the Commissioner of the United States, Riga, Latvia (22 December 1920), confidential memorandum: "Tula Arms Works," Records, document 861.60.27.

to privilege, and that defined the social status of the commanders over the masses. This aspect of militarized labor too was there to stay for another seven decades.

According to wage scales established at the end of 1919, unskilled workers were paid from 2,200 to 3,000 rubles per month in 1920. Skilled workers received from 3,000 to 4,000 rubles, engineers and technicians up to 5,500 rubles, and department chiefs from 6,200 to 7,000 rubles a month. Some top officials and Red directors were drawing as much as 100,000 or 120,000 rubles a month. In addition to a set wage scale the workers' income consisted of pay for overtime, bonuses, and nonmonetary compensation, that is, distributions of food and clothing directly at the workplace. For a typical skilled machine operator, for example, the regular wage plus bonus amounted to about 6,000–7,000 rubles a month. Four or five hours of overtime daily brought another 3,700 rubles. Such a worker could make from 10,000 to 12,000 rubles in monetary compensation. In addition workers in category "A" enterprises, mostly at munitions plants, and in the "noncombatant Red Army allowance" category received a food allowance. In Petrograd, for example, it was 25 pounds of bread, 1.5 pounds of sugar, 6 pounds of millet, 2–5 pounds of fish, and 0.5 pounds of tobacco. At free market prices these items were worth from 12,000 to 15,000 rubles. So from all sources a skilled worker in the highest category of pay and food allowance received from 24,000 to 26,000 rubles worth of compensation for a twelve-hour workday.³⁵

What could a worker purchase with his 12,000 rubles in addition to his food ration in kind? In Moscow and Petrograd the free market prices for basic commodities were as follows: sugar 4,500 rubles, butter 5,000 rubles, and meat 3,000 rubles a pound; a bottle of milk, 250 rubles. In other words a worker could buy with his wages either four pounds of meat or three pounds of sugar a month in addition to his ration. According to a confidential American memorandum on conditions at the Tula armaments plant, the workers' food supply from all sources was sufficient for two weeks in a month only.³⁶ In a letter to Lenin, Lunacharsky cited a Moscow worker complaining: "We are given a decent ration at the plant, but they give us nothing for our wives and children, and we return from work to hungry families."³⁷ Compared with 1917, Petrograd workers' purchasing power had diminished by twenty times, according to the calculations of Boris Sokolov.³⁸ Needless to say, the situation of unskilled

³⁵ Boris Sokolov, "The Russian Proletariat under the Bolshevik Rule." This is a reprint in English of a series of articles Boris Sokolov published in *Volia Rossii* on 1, 4, 8, 10, 14, and 18 December 1920. Here, *Bulletin of the Russian Information Bureau in the U.S.*, no. 22–23 (15 January 1921), p. 7. Hereinafter Sokolov, "The Russian Proletariat."

³⁶ Office of the Commissioner of the United States, Riga, Latvia (22 December 1920), confidential memorandum: "Tula Arms Works," Records, dispatch 861.60.27.

³⁷ Lunacharsky to Lenin (26 February 1921), *Literaturnoe Nasledstvo*, vol. 80, p. 254.

³⁸ Sokolov, "The Russian Proletariat," p. 7.

workers was much worse. And prices soared even higher by the end of 1920. Russian workers were compelled to subsist on starvation diets. By contrast the leaders of the "proletarian" revolution were well provided for. Martov, among others, wrote to a friend in a private letter not intended for publication that he had occasion to observe the life-styles of the top Bolshevik leaders.

As far as the "commissars' estate" is concerned, its superior standard of living is almost out in the open, or should I say less concealed than last year. People like Riazanov, Radek, and Rykov, who had earlier fought against "inequality," now display on their tables white bread, rice, butter, meat, and (at Radek's and Rykov's) a bottle of good wine and cognac. Karakhan, Kamenev, Bonch [Bruevich], Demian Bednyi, Steklov, et al. obviously enjoy life. Only Angelica [Balabanoff], Bukharin, and Chicherin among the stars of the first caliber are still noted for their "simplicity of disposition."³⁹

Clearly this inequality generated a growing resentment among the workers. At the Geissler factory in Petrograd workers adopted the following resolution in August 1920: "We feel provoked at seeing the Communists at our factory well dressed in leather jackets and trousers, also because they frequently obtain special rations and extra allowances."⁴⁰

Workers' Responses

The workers' most common response to their situation was to escape. The flight of workers from cities is illustrated by the following comparison. The industrial census of August 1918 covering thirty-five provinces showed 1,253,000 workers employed at 6,090 industrial enterprises. In June 1920 there were only 867,000 workers at 5,877 enterprises in the same provinces, which meant that "from August 1918 to June 1920 the number of factories decreased by 3–5 percent and the number of workers by 31 percent."⁴¹

According to various statistical data, it was primarily the skilled workers who fled to the villages and set up all kinds of repair and artisan shops there. The British delegation described the workers' motivation to seek refuge in the villages. The delegation was informed "by a worker from the Kolomna works who stated that desertion from the works was frequent and that deserters were arrested by soldiers and brought from the villages. . . . Also the peasants were willing to employ men at much higher wages than they can get in the factories and workshops, plus a plentiful supply of food which the town worker does not

³⁹ Iu. O. Martov to S. D. Shchupak (26 June 1920). The original is in the Nicolaevsky Collection, series 21, box 60, folder 1, reprinted in English in Brovkin, ed., *Dear Comrades*, p. 210.

⁴⁰ Sokolov, "The Russian Proletariat," p. 9.

⁴¹ *Ekonomicheskaiia zhizn'* (29 October 1920).

TABLE 3

Decrease in Number of Workers from 1918 to 1920 by City

Province	Number in 1918	Number in 1920	Decrease
Ivanovo-Voznesensk	146,300	30,600	75%
Kostroma	17,600	8,100	54%
Moscow	378,000	218,000	42%
Petrograd	140,000	102,400	27%
Vladimir	103,000	21,200	80%

Source: *Ekonomicheskaja zhizn'* (29 October 1920).

have."⁴² By the end of 1920 the workers' flight from the cities endangered the normal functioning of even those few plants that were in operation. The Bolsheviks responded by mobilizing, conscripting, and assigning new soldier-workers to the factories, but often these new conscripts tried to escape as well, as countless reports from across the country attest: "Working conditions at the Kostroma Plo factory are so bad as a result of the long compulsory workday and poor nutrition that many workers cannot stand it any longer and flee to the villages. In this way also the machinists who were sent over here from the Kaluga factory have left as well as the Red Army soldiers assigned here from the Kostroma garrison."⁴³ Those workers who stayed for one reason or another developed all kinds of ways of dealing with the situation as best they could. They had to be at a factory, but they had no motivation to work hard. In this instance the workers' most typical response was a slowdown, or *volynka* in Russian.⁴⁴ It can best be summarized by a saying usually associated with the Brezhnev era but just as applicable to 1920: "They pretend to pay, and we pretend to work."

The observations of a group of German workers are particularly apt here. Under the influence of Communist propaganda they emigrated to the land of the victorious proletariat in 1920. These were skilled workers, and they were placed at the Kolomna locomotive plant near Moscow. Most of them considered themselves Communists. They were appalled by just about everything they saw: the miserable food rations, the incompetence and arbitrariness of the administration, but also the work habits of Russian workers. By German standards Russian workers did not work at all. Every half an hour, complained one of them, they take a smoke break. Then they would go from one section to

⁴² British Labour Delegation to Russia, 1920. Report.

⁴³ Boris Sokolov, "Polozhenie proletariata v Sovetskoï Rossii," *Volia Rossii* (4 December 1920), p. 1.

⁴⁴ For a discussion of *volynki* (go-slow strikes) and specific cases, see A. Nadeschdin, "La Situation des Ouvriers dans La Russie Soviétique," *Les Informations Démocratiques Russes Bulletin*, no. 13 (March–April 1920), 1.

another, talk and kill time and pass the day. Another added that many were not workers in the proper sense but conscripted peasants from nearby villages. They had no interest in their work whatsoever.⁴⁵ They stole whatever they could from the plant to manufacture knives and saws for sale on the side. When the German workers raised these issues, they were labeled counterrevolutionaries, wreckers, and spies. Their situation quickly became untenable and they tried to leave Russia, but it was not so easy. What the Germans experienced in Kolomna was commonplace across the country. A Socialist Revolutionary reported from the Urals: "The productivity of labor is falling; theft is on the rise. Absolutely everybody is stealing, from the top administrators down to the apprentices. Every worker is stealing whatever he can put his hands on."⁴⁶

What emerges from these reports is a vicious circle in the social relations of labor. Workers' attempts to flee led the Bolsheviks to fix them to the plants and to introduce ever more stringent punishment. The workers responded with slowdowns, theft, and, as we shall see, strikes; the Bolsheviks—by ever mounting repression. The Bolshevik solutions did not work. Conscription, control, and punishment failed to motivate Russian workers to work well. Theft and slow work habits were manifestations of workers' adaptation to their situation. They could do little, since those who stayed in the cities had nowhere to go and any protest only exacerbated their situation. This sense of hopelessness is well expressed in a number of worker resolutions. The Kolpino plant workers near Petrograd wrote: "It is a shame and deplorable that Russian workers, owing to the stupid economic policy of the Bolsheviks, are doomed to extinction and half of them have already died. In the suburbs of towns there is an abundance of food, of bread and meat, and yet it is unobtainable since buying and selling has been prohibited. What do the Communists care for the working men, as long as they [the Communists] are well fed and clothed?"⁴⁷ Food, lack of food, restrictions on trade with food, privileges in food distribution—in a word everything associated with food became the dominant theme in all worker protests of 1920. One can discern the bitter complaining tone in this resolution of the Obukhov plant workers: "At a time when workers have for a year already been unable, because of low wages, to buy meat and fat, being compelled to subsist on rye bread only, the commissars are well fed and provided for."⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Original report of the German workers is *Kolomna. Erlebnisse von 76 Rückwanderern der Interessengemeinschaft der Auswandererorganisationen nach Sowjet Russland* (n.d.). Cited here from Wilhelm Dittman's account first published in *Freiheit* in Berlin and a summary in *Peuple* (4 September 1920). For Dittman's report in English, see "Dittmann's Description of Conditions," *American Federationist*, vol. 27 (December 1920), 1097–1101. See also "Nemetskie rabochie v Sovetskoi Rossii," *Volia Rossii* (12 September 1920), 6.

⁴⁶ "Polozhenie na Urale. Pis'mo iz Ekaterinburga," a handwritten letter to the PSR Central Committee, PSR Archive, document 2045.

⁴⁷ George Strumilo (here spelled Stroomilo), "Russia and the Russian Workers under the Bolshevik Rule," *American Federationist*, vol. 28 (May 1921), 389.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

Clearly when people are hungry, they are concerned with food more than with the constitutional order. This led Mensheviks like Abramovich to write dismissively that "workers were sinking ever deeper into the swamp of everyday concerns, the struggle for bread, clothes, and heating."⁴⁹ He implied that workers were no longer interested in politics. Other observers, however, noted that the bitterness and despair in workers' voices revealed the intensity of their political attitudes. Boris Sokolov, a sociologist, came to the conclusion in 1920 that a "furious opposition to the Communist authorities" was on the rise among the workers.⁵⁰ What was new in comparison with 1918 was a clear-cut distinction in identity between workers and Communists: "we" and "they." The category "we" was associated with being hungry and "they" with well fed; "we" with poor clothes and "they" with leather jackets; "we" with suffering from conscription, fines, and imprisonment and "they" with a gun-waving Cheka boss. Sokolov's observations on the political nature of workers' protests find confirmation in a report to the State Department by the American consul in Vyborg, a keen observer of political life in Petrograd: "At the two largest Petrograd works, namely Putiloff and Skorokhod, the workmen demanded control over the factories, and the elimination of Commisary management, permission to change factories, longer luncheon time and larger food supply. All the demands were rejected and therefore economic disorders on 1 July continued."⁵¹ These ostensibly purely economic demands in fact challenged the militarized labor system and, by Trotsky's own logic, the very foundations of the socialist order. Not only were these demands political; they were explicitly anti-Communist in the context of 1920.

And finally top secret, weekly All-Russian Cheka reports to Lenin speak without any reservations about workers' anti-Communist attitudes:

Petrograd: Railroad workers' disposition is outright White Guardist.⁵²

Ekaterinoslav: Ferment is noticeable among the workers. Using this, the Mensheviks and other counterrevolutionaries are conducting anti-Soviet agitation and are enjoying some success.

Kuban: The disposition of the population is counterrevolutionary.⁵³

Discussing the trajectory of workers' attitudes in Petrograd, a rank-and-file Socialist Revolutionary prophetically forecast in September: "profound hatred among the workers is rising against Soviet power. Sooner or later this hatred is going to lead to an open insurrection."⁵⁴

⁴⁹ Abramowitsch [German spelling of Abramovich], *Die Zukunft Sowjet Russlands*, p. 23.

⁵⁰ Boris Sokolov, "Pis'mo iz Butyrskoi tiur'my," *Volia Rossii* (1 October 1920).

⁵¹ Quarton to Secretary of State (10 July 1920), Records, dispatch 861.50.108.

⁵² "Ezhenedel'nye svodki Sekret'nogo otdela Vecheka. Tovarishchu Leninu," Ts.G.A.O.R., Fond 130, Opis' 3, document 414, p. 13.

⁵³ Ibid. (16–31 July 1920).

⁵⁴ "Razval Sovetskoi Rossii. Moskva. Ot nashego korrespondenta," *Volia Rossii* (24 October 1920).

Elections

What may appear confusing at first glance is that the above-cited workers' attitudes do not match the official election returns to the soviets. Almost all official Soviet data on elections to soviets in 1920 and during the subsequent seventy years show over 90 percent support for the Communists. If such returns accurately correspond to workers' attitudes, then all these reports on complaints and strikes can be dismissed as inventions of malicious Mensheviks and SRs, as the Communist revolutionary tribunals actually did. If on the other hand the above-cited workers' attitudes are accurate, how then account for the Bolshevik victories? To explain this contradiction one has to abandon the assumption that official voting results reflect expressions of workers' free will. The compulsion to work certainly had its counterpart in a compulsion to vote. Second, the votes of actual workers were diluted by the votes of representatives of various administrations and bureaucracies. Third, the overall size of the soviets grew constantly from 1917 onward, so that more and more people represented more and more bureaucracies, whereas the actual number of workers continued to decline.

In the Moscow soviet of 1920, for example, the enterprises voted directly for only a very small number out of the total of 1,500 seats. Trade unions and the army garrison officially sent their own representatives. But in fact soldiers were simply ordered whom to vote for. The Moscow Council of Trade Unions had 96 seats allotted to it, each to represent 5,000 union members. In fact of course union members never even knew who "represented" them in the soviet. So the Council of Trade Unions consisting of 100 members sent 96 of them to the Moscow soviet.⁵⁵ Communist bureaucracies drowned the workers' vote in the soviets.

A good example in this instance is the Petrograd soviet. From some 400–500 members in 1917 and 800–900 members in 1918 it grew to over 2,000 members in 1920. Of those more than 50 percent were representatives of the army and police. The Bolshevik party, numbering only 22,000 in Petrograd, had almost 2,000 of its members in the soviet, which means that every tenth Communist had a seat in the soviet.⁵⁶ A party of 3 percent of the population had 90 percent of the seats in the soviet. Such a huge assembly could not possibly have been a policy-making or even a deliberating institution. It assembled primarily to acclaim decisions made behind closed doors. A ritual was established for the next seventy years: the party decides; the handpicked "workers" representatives applaud.

Why did the Bolsheviks bother to have elections at all? In fact in many cities and provinces they did not in 1920. But in general elections could not be

⁵⁵ "Struktura sovetov" (Menshevik CC report to the British delegation), Nicolaevsky Collection, series 6, box 1, folder 16(2).

⁵⁶ "Le Soviet de Petrograd (Analyse statistique)," *Pour la Russie*, no. 10 (6 October 1920).

phased out altogether, because the pretence had to be maintained that Russia was a republic of soviets. Moreover, without any risk of losing, the Bolsheviks had an opportunity to sound out what the popular attitudes really were during an election campaign. To stage an election that would unmask hidden Mensheviks and SRs, coerce workers to vote the right way, and produce a correct composition of the soviet that would applaud at the right moment was an art that the Bolsheviks perfected over many decades. In 1920, however, they were not as experienced, and things often went wrong.

The most common practice was to conduct elections at a collective's general meeting by an open show of hands. If a director of a factory was running, few had the courage to raise their hands in opposition. At elections to the city soviet in Smolensk, for example, the provincial economic council was allotted a certain number of seats in the soviet. A commissar who was a candidate from the Communist party and the chairman of the electoral commission and the chairman of the election meeting—and running unopposed—was “elected” unanimously by an open show of hands.⁵⁷ Yet there was a mishap. The Smolensk Province Food Supply Committee's 1,000 employees were allotted 5 representatives. Only 300 voters showed up at the election meeting. Of those 196 voted for the Menshevik list and 70 for the Bolshevik one. Seeing this unfavorable turn, an election committee member said that he had just received 150 votes for the Bolsheviks from other employees scattered all over the province. That was clearly impossible because the election lists were publicly announced only at this meeting. Bolshevik votes were prepared in advance, and these “voters” could not possibly have known whom they had voted for, if they had voted at all. A scandal broke out. Yet the election commission recognized the results as legal. According to another source, delegates representing the Red Army were never elected by army units. The Bolsheviks simply selected a list of those who ostensibly represented the army.⁵⁸ The final victory of the Communists in elections to the Smolensk soviet was assured: 284 Communists, 29 nonparty delegates, and only 17 Mensheviks were elected.

The Communists took the matter of elections very seriously even though the final outcome was seldom in doubt; even if it were, it did not matter because the soviets had no power. The communists needed the result for their theater of the absurd. They needed to report to their superiors that on their sector of the ideological front loyalty to the vanguard of the proletariat was assured. If intimidation and manipulation did not work, the Cheka was called in for more direct action. For example, at the elections to the Petrograd soviet in December 1919 some SRs from the Narod group, a legal Soviet party, managed to post a list of candidates only at two plants of the Nikolayev railroad. In both they won. The

⁵⁷ “Kommunisticheskie i demokraticheskie vybory,” *Volia Rossii* (10 November 1920), 3.

⁵⁸ Committee to Collect Information on Russia, “Red Army Election in Smolensk,” in *Report (Political and Economic)*, p. 34.

Bolsheviks declared the election meeting improper and scheduled another meeting. This time they tried to dilute the workers' vote with activists from outside who appeared at the meeting. Yet the workers were firm and voted for their candidates again. The next day Cheka agents appeared at the home of one of the SR candidates, Rudakov, and seized his wife as a hostage, a clear warning to drop out of the race.⁵⁹

During the election campaign in Vitebsk the local Cheka arrested several prominent Social Democrats, among them Karavkin and Tseitlin-Batursky, and offered them a deal: they would be freed if they promised to drop out of the race. They refused and were kept in jail, where Batursky died shortly thereafter.⁶⁰ Similarly in Mogilev, at the soviet election in November 1920, the Cheka arrested all members of the Social Democratic party committee and officially charged them with a crime: anti-Soviet agitation during the election campaign. They were sentenced to internment in a concentration camp for the duration of the civil war.⁶¹

Such electoral mechanics and Cheka methods make it very difficult to determine workers' political preferences from election results. Yet the few instances where a detailed breakdown of the vote by enterprise is available suggest that most workers voted for the opposition parties if they had a chance to run in elections. The Tula armaments plant had always been a stronghold of the Mensheviks. At the election to the Tula soviet in the spring of 1920, as *Pravda* attested, Menshevik appeals to return the soviet to elected workers' representatives, to abolish the Cheka, and to abandon the one-party dictatorship were met with stormy applause. *Pravda* lamented that "they listen to our speakers attentively but without engagement [*bezdeiatelno*]. They listen to the Mensheviks attentively also, but they applaud with enthusiasm."⁶²

Out of the 320 members elected to the Tula soviet, the Communists had 185, those without party affiliation numbered 90, and the Social Democrats had 45. This result suggests an overwhelming Communist victory in a major industrial town. In fact the Mensheviks actually won a majority over the Bolsheviks in the workers' constituency.⁶³ Fifty percent of the Communist vote came from the army garrison and 25 percent from the trade union bureaucracies; that is, 75 percent of the Bolshevik members were selected and self-appointed rather than elected. Only 25 percent were in theory workers' representatives, but in practice only a small fraction of those were freely elected by workers. On the other hand, of the 45 Social Democrats elected, 35 (78 percent) were representatives of the armaments and cartridge plants, and 10

⁵⁹ "Vyborny v Petrogradskii Sovet," *Narod*, no. 2-3 (10 March 1920), p. 34.

⁶⁰ "Persecution contre les social-démocrates," *Pour La Russie*, no. 46 (9 February 1921), p. 3.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² "V Rabochei gushche. Na perevyborakh Tul'skogo soveta," *Pravda* (26 March 1920), 1.

⁶³ B. A. Skomorovsky to Axel'rod, handwritten (2 May 1920), Axelrod Archive.

were elected by the trade unions.⁶⁴ In Kharkov, out of a total of 700 soviet seats, the Communists won 467, 240 of which represented the garrison, the Cheka, and the soviet employees. Without the appointees of the trade union bureaucracy, which represented itself, the Bolsheviks had fewer than 200 members elected, and even fewer of those elected by workers. The Social Democrats on the other hand had 220 delegates—all elected, and all by workers.⁶⁵

The All-Russian Cheka monitored workers' political attitudes attentively and systematically. Nothing escaped its attention. Every incident of anti-Bolshevik campaigning, every protest action, and every gathering was recorded and reported to Lenin every week. For example, in February a weekly compilation included this prosaic item: "Petrograd: At the Aleksandrovsky plant, a foreman Bystrov, a Menshevik, is conducting malicious anti-Soviet agitation."⁶⁶ Lenin and the Cheka were aware that the opposition parties enjoyed considerable support, as is clear from dozens of items in weekly reports to Lenin:

Bryansk: The Menshevik party represents a large and coherent group here. They work underground and enjoy the support of workers at factories and plants.⁶⁷

Petrograd: Aleksandrovsky plant: The minority of the PSR [Narod faction] has developed long roots in the workers' milieu. They are propagating ideas inimical to the Third International.⁶⁸

In any case workers' votes for the opposition parties' candidates could not improve their social or political situation, since the soviets had no power. That is why the workers' only means of expressing dissatisfaction was to go on strike.

Strikes

One important aspect of the workers' movement in 1920 was that strikes were no longer effective in defense of workers' rights, but for reasons different than in 1918. Then, workers were afraid to lose their jobs. At that time a strike inevitably led to closure of the factory, a dismissal of workers, and a careful screening of those rehired to determine their political preferences. In 1920 the Bolsheviks used these methods as well, but workers feared most not merely dismissal but

⁶⁴ "Struktura sovetov" (Menshevik CC report to the British delegation), Nicolaevsky Collection, series no. 6, box 1, folder 16(2).

⁶⁵ Ibid. and "Resul'taty vyborov v Khar'kovskii sovet Rabochikh i Krasnoarmeiskikh deputatov," *Proletarii*, no. 3 (2 April 1920), 1.

⁶⁶ "Ezhenedel'nye svodki Sekretnogo otdela Vecheka. Tovarishchu Leninu" (7–14 February 1920), Ts.G.A.O.R., Fond 130, SNK, Opis' 3, document 414.

⁶⁷ "Ezhenedel'naia svodka Sekretnogo otdela Vecheka. Svodka no. 81 Tovarishchu Leninu" (25 August 1920), Ts.G.A.O.R., Fond 130, SNK, Opis' 3, document 414(2), p. 68.

⁶⁸ "Politichaskie partii i gruppy. Svodka Informatsionnogo Otdela, Sekretnogo otdela Vecheka. Tovarishchu Leninu" (10 August 1920), Ts.G.A.O.R., Fond 130, SNK, Opis' 4, document 268(2).

internment in a concentration camp. Under the conditions of militarized labor a strike was considered an act of desertion from the labor front. The Bolshevik press treated strikes with the same vehemence as if they were a matter of state treason. *Pravda* was full of headlines such as this: "Stab in the Back!" "Agents of Denikin," "Yellow Mosquitoes!" (that is, the strikers). It was imperative to free the working class from inciters. The only good place for a striker, *Pravda* threatened, was in a concentration camp.⁶⁹ Resorting to a strike in 1920 was an act of desperation rather than a bargaining technique, as in 1917. Workers knew that nothing good awaited them if they struck. And yet they did, usually in response to unexpected repressive measures.

According to official statistics of the Commissariat of Labor, during the first six months of 1920 there were strikes in 77 percent of the medium- and large-size enterprises of Russia. Ninety percent of all strikes took place at state enterprises and 10 percent at private enterprises. At such plants as Obukhov, Skorokhod, and Izhorsky (Kolpino) several strikes took place during this period. The largest number of strikes was in the metal industry, the smallest in the chemical industry.⁷⁰ These calculations suggest that a linkage existed between the degree of militarization and the degree of workers' unrest. The unhappiest workers in Russia were at large state metal industry enterprises and railroad plants. These were the most important sectors of industry, hence heavily militarized and potentially explosive.

The voices of the strikers and Bolshevik commissars tell us more about the nature of social relations in Communist Russia than the official resolutions of fake workers' congresses drafted by the Communist propaganda machine. In March 1920 a group of workers in Ekaterinburg submitted a petition to Trotsky, who was then in the Urals setting up his labor armies. The authors of the petition tried to collect workers' signatures and called on them to express no confidence in the soviet, party, and trade union organizations. Strong language referred to them as being like a gendarmerie and the old regime. Some workers supported this petition and stopped work. From the Communists' point of view a grave crime had been committed. The text of the verdict of the Revolutionary Tribunal of the First Labor Army, chaired by G. L. Piatakov, gives a good idea of what Trotsky, Piatakov, and Company considered to be criminal activity. The substance of the charges against Fedor Illinykh, one of the authors of the petition, was that he had "composed a petition of an obviously White Guardist character aiming to discredit completely the power of workers and peasants." Four other authors were accused of "an attempt to inculcate in workers a false understanding of the tasks of Soviet power and its directives." The tribunal resolved: "By committing this grave crime against the Soviet Republic, Illinykh has definitely revealed himself as an enemy of the toiling people and deserves

⁶⁹ See, for example, "Rabochaia zhizn'. Na chistuiu vodu," *Pravda* (16 January 1920), or "Professional'noe dvizhenie," *Pravda* (15 February 1920), or "Udar v spinu," *Pravda* (12 February 1920).

⁷⁰ Boris Sokolov in *Volia Rossii* (18 December 1920), 2.

the highest degree of punishment—execution by firing squad.”⁷¹ It is somewhat ironic that the Stalinist sentence pronounced against Piatakov and others some years later used the same vocabulary. Illinykh’s sentence was reduced to a five-year term in a concentration camp. Nothing was said in the verdict, however, about the fate of the other eighty workers arrested in connection with this affair. Their fate remains unknown.⁷²

One can cite dozens of similar verdicts passed by revolutionary tribunals all over Russia and Ukraine in 1920. Expressing a critical opinion and calling for a strike were the most common charges in all cases. The Revolutionary Tribunal in Simbirsk charged twelve workers of the cartridge plant with a gamut of crimes, such as: “the accused carried out malicious sabotage in the form of an ‘Italian strike’ by means of counterrevolutionary speeches; guilty of malicious agitation against Soviet power during the strike; charged with systematic inciting of the masses, playing on their lack of political consciousness; charged with false interpretation of the Soviet tariff policy.”⁷³ One can deduce from these charges that the accused workers publicly criticized low wages, an order to work without pay on a Saturday, and the privileges of Communist party members. The tribunal found Nikolai Filipov, a worker and member of the SR party, guilty. His sentence was execution by firing squad, suspended for a year so that he could “prove his loyalty to Soviet power.” Mikhail Kiselev, a Menshevik worker, was sentenced to ten years imprisonment, replaced by immediate dispatch to the front line against Poland. Other workers were sentenced to various terms of hard labor or internment in concentration camps.

The Communists were convinced that all they had to do to ensure that the masses obey was to remove troublemakers. For example, in July the Cheka reported to Lenin that twenty-two strikers in Petrograd were removed.⁷⁴ And in October after a similar strike the Cheka report specified that an investigation was being conducted in order to “identify the organizers of the strike.”⁷⁵ Lunacharsky, obviously in full accord with such methods, gleefully reported to Lenin that in the city of Nikolayev in southern Ukraine the Naval’ plant was “cleansed” perfectly. “It turned out that one had to cleanse the plant only lightly. It was sufficient to remove eighty people for the plant to become ‘silky.’”⁷⁶ Lunacharsky explained what the word *silky* meant. At least half of those present at the plant meeting were Mensheviks, yet a resolution was

⁷¹ A photocopy of the original verdict was published by the SRs in “Za kulisami pravitel’stvennogo mekhanizma. Proletariat vne zakona,” *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 10 (July 1921), 28.

⁷² “Polozhenie na Urale. Pis’mo iz Ekaterinburga,” handwritten letter to the PSR Central Committee, PSR Archive, document 2045.

⁷³ “Iz khroniki Bol’shevistskogo pravosudiia,” *Sotsialisticheskii Vestnik*, no. 3 (1 March 1921).

⁷⁴ “Informatsionnaia svodka Sekret’nogo otdela Vecheka Tovarishchu Leninu” (1–15 July 1920), Ts.G.A.O.R., Fond 130, SNK, Opis’ 3, document 414.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* (1–10 October 1920), p. 7.

⁷⁶ “Doklad Lunacharskogo Leninu ob obshchem polozhenii Nikolaevskoi i Odesskoi gubernii,” *Literaturnoe Nasledstvo*, vol. 80, p. 460.

adopted unanimously that the Communist party was the only genuine leader of the working class. Lunacharsky made no secret that he knew, as did everyone else, that such declarations of loyalty were made under compulsion, as a result of fear after the "cleansing" of the plant. The commissar of enlightenment praised such subtle measures highly. They had a long-lasting educational effect.

In Ekaterinburg and Simbirsk workers did express political opinions. Yet in many other cases, as in Nikolayev, they did not dare to venture into politics but concerned themselves with specific situations at their factories. A strike at the Aleksandrovsky locomotive plant of the Nikolaevsky railroad in Petrograd was set in motion in August by an order to work overtime. Twenty-eight workers did not show up. The commissar of the plant, Firsov, deprived them of their Red Army food ration for seven days and yelled at them: "Hey you, scoundrels. You'll see what its like stopping work! You scoundrels, should have been thrown out long time ago."⁷⁷ Workers elected delegates to discuss the matter, but they were arrested. Then they appealed to the member of the Petrograd soviet who represented their constituency, one Bystrov, an SR. They asked him to communicate to the Petrograd soviet the following demands: that all those arrested be released and their fines rescinded, that a prison railcar be removed from the premises, since workers had been incarcerated there for all kinds of trivial offenses, and finally that a customary form of punishment, exile to the north, be abolished. Until these demands were met, workers went on strike. Bystrov tried to intervene in the Petrograd soviet on behalf of the strikers, but to no avail. The strikers were fired. At night Bystrov himself was arrested along with thirty other workers. That same night the Cheka arrested some workers at the Rechkin, Metal works, and Obukhov plants, as a precaution or a threat. The Communist party cell at the Aleksandrovsky plant proposed that the workers elect some other, nonopposition party representative to the soviet. Some workers refused and walked out of the meeting. Those who walked out were arrested immediately, 150 people. Some were exiled to the north and others transferred elsewhere. It is hard to disagree with the SR report that the Cheka used the opportunity offered by the strike to remove politically active workers and their leaders, members of opposition parties.⁷⁸

In Ekaterinburg, Simbirsk, and Petrograd the initiative belonged to the workers. They drafted a petition or a list of demands. In many other cases it was the Communists, paradoxical as it may seem at first, who deliberately provoked strikes in order to "unmask enemies of Soviet power." A case in point was the strike of workers of the Ryazan-Urals railroad. On 7 May 1921 the Cheka arrested a railroad worker named Mikhailov, a Socialist Revolutionary popular

⁷⁷ "V Petrograde," *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 10 (July 1921), 21–23.

⁷⁸ "Pravda o sobytiakh v Aleksandrovskikh masterskikh Nikolaevskoi zheleznoi dorogi," *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 4 (March 1921), 25–26.

among the workers. It was clear from the start that railroad workers were not going to acquiesce to Mikhailov's arrest. They instructed their deputies to the Moscow soviet to demand Mikhailov's release. They did and were arrested in turn by the Moscow Cheka. Workers sent another delegation to the local Ryazan Cheka, but this delegation was also arrested. Every attempt to negotiate was cut short by repressive and illegal measures. Angry workers marched to the local Cheka and were just about ready to storm it when they found out that Mikhailov and others had been transferred to Moscow. The workers then went on strike demanding the immediate release of all those arrested. The authorities shut down the depot, brought in troops, and arrested another hundred workers. All workers at that depot were dismissed, and only those who agreed to sign a promissory note to the effect that they would henceforth support Soviet power were allowed to return to their jobs. Three hundred workers were not rehired.⁷⁹

In a letter to Axelrod, B. A. Skomorovsky, the secretary of the Menshevik party, who had handled correspondence with the local party organizations and had at his disposal a vast amount of information on labor conflicts, cited examples when Communist authorities pushed workers to strike as part of a deliberate policy to purge the most outspoken and independent from the workers' ranks.⁸⁰ In some cases the Communist authorities created a special institution, a commission for the purging of the plant. Such a commission handled the strike at the Kharkov locomotive plant.⁸¹ When the strike broke out, the authorities let the workers draft their demands and allowed a protest rally. Only a day later all those who spoke at the rally and drafted the demands were arrested.

Workers who were seized in these purges could not be held as strikers. They had to be labeled. That immediately resolved the question as to the causes of the strike and made it possible to apply force without restraint. If a strike broke out, it was automatically labeled a White Guards' conspiracy. Labeling was becoming one of the most important features of Bolshevik political culture. Labeling guaranteed that the authorities were always right and the protesters always wrong. It immediately defined a labor conflict not in terms of two equal parties in a dispute but in terms of loyalty to Soviet power. The authorities, no matter how corrupt or incompetent, appeared as defenders of socialism, and the protesters as its opponents. Communist bosses needed labeling to cover up their misdeeds. It was their best defense against the control and supervision imposed by superior state authorities.

Among the numerous so-called White Guards' conspiracies of 1920 was the workers' protest at the Izhevsk and Votkinsk plants in the Urals. In the Bolshevik

⁷⁹ "Lokaut na Riazansko-Ural'skoi zheleznoi doroge," *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 10 (July 1921), 24.

⁸⁰ B. A. Skomorovsky to Pavel Axelrod, handwritten (25 June 1920), Axelrod Archive.

⁸¹ "Khar'kov," *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 8 (May 1921), 25.

mind the very name of these plants evoked an image of a counterrevolutionary conspiracy, since the workers at these plants rose in rebellion after the Bolsheviks had lost elections and disbanded a newly elected Menshevik- and SR-led soviet in August 1918. It was all the more convenient, then, to label any labor dispute at these plants another White Guards' conspiracy. What really happened in 1920 was that workers drafted a list of demands, just as they did in Ekaterinburg, Petrograd, and Kharkov.⁸² Like most workers' demands these primarily concerned economic issues. Workers wanted "all types of food rations equalized" and the leather boots they were supposed to receive actually delivered to workers and not the bosses. Only the last item in the list expressed a political opinion, the demand that the militarization of labor be abolished. It is not known how the Bolsheviks dealt with this particular expression of discontent labeled a "conspiracy." But a few months earlier, in response to an industrial action elsewhere caused by the Izhevsk workers, Lenin wrote in a classified message to Siberia: "Paikes reports that there is manifest sabotage on the part of the railway workers. . . . They suspect sabotage by Izhevsk workers. I am surprised that you are putting up with this and that you do not shoot for sabotage."⁸³ Lenin's, Trotsky's, Piatakov's, Lunacharsky's, and the All-Russian Cheka's instructions to local officials on how to deal with labor protest leave no doubt that repressive measures against workers were not examples of the excesses of local autocrats but a part of the officially sanctioned policy.

Confronting an overwhelming force, dismissal, exile, or even execution, workers internalized their hostility and were reluctant to display it. But if and when it erupted, it could not be stopped. In these moments workers seemed not to care what might come. The strike in Tula in June 1920 is an example of such an emotional response of nonviolent character. The Menshevik caucus in the Tula soviet followed scrupulously Martov's policy of strictly observing Soviet law and avoiding confrontation with the Communists. From the experience of strikes in 1919 the Tula Mensheviks drew the lesson that any strike actually played into the hands of the Cheka. Strikes ended invariably with arrests and the exile of SD leaders and active workers. The Tula Mensheviks defined their political role as mediators between the workers and the plant management. They agreed with the Bolsheviks that strikes had harmed production at a crucial munitions plant but added that in order to avoid strikes the social and economic concerns of workers had to be addressed. They skillfully used the Bolsheviks' own rhetoric that everything in Soviet Russia was for the workers, that it was a

⁸² "Zagovor v Sovetskoï Rossii," *Volia Rossii* (12 October 1920).

⁸³ Lenin to the Military Revolutionary Council of the Fifth Army, Smirnov (29 January 1920), top secret. Everything except address coded. *Trotsky Papers*, vol. 2, document 444, p. 20. It is noteworthy that in Lenin's so-called *Complete Works*, where Lenin refers to former Izhevsk workers who had been transferred to Omsk, the sentence on shooting was omitted. See Lenin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 51, p. 127.

workers' state, and that the soviets were working class organizations, which, according to Lenin, represented a superior form of democracy. Therefore it was the soviet and not the Cheka that should have the last say in city affairs, argued the Mensheviks. It was hard for the Bolsheviks to object publicly to this reasoning. The Mensheviks acted as if Bolshevik pro-worker propaganda and the Soviet Constitution were for real. They clung to their status of a legal opposition party and stayed clear of any involvement in what the Bolsheviks could label a White Guards' conspiracy. A strike usually presented the Mensheviks with some very difficult choices: How could they preserve the allegiance of their constituency and avoid decimation by the Cheka?

Unexpectedly in June 1920 a small incident escalated into a strike which revealed with utmost clarity the mentality, political culture, and social relations in a Russian industrial city.⁸⁴ On Sunday, 6 June, the workers in the tool shop quit work and demanded that a general meeting take place. They disagreed with an order of the plant administration to work overtime on Sunday, because that Sunday was a religious holiday. They also objected to the conscription of women for work on Sundays, because women usually went to the surrounding villages to purchase food from peasants on Sundays. It is important that workers did not object to being ordered to work overtime on Sundays in principle but only on that particular Sunday. They did not object to their wives being conscripted for work in principle but only on Sundays. In other words they refused to comply with additional burdens unexpectedly imposed on them. There were also rumors at the plant that a Red Army unit that had received a shipment of guns from the Tula works had sent some flour and fat for the Tula workers but the Communist bosses had divided these goods among themselves.

A representative of the plant administration, Arsent'ev, came to the tool workshop with a Cheka detachment and demanded the immediate resumption of work. The workers started clamoring and insisting that a general meeting be summoned to hear their complaints. The Cheka men arrested a majority of the tool shop workers and led them under guard to the Cheka headquarters. The news quickly spread to the rest of the plant. One after another all workshops stopped work. Many demanded an explanation from Arsent'ev and insisted in turn that a general meeting of the plant be summoned. The plant administration refused and declared a state of emergency for the entire plant. A special troika was formed to deal with what was called sabotage. The troika's first announcement was that it had discovered a counterrevolutionary conspiracy at the plant engineered by Polish spies and Black Hundreds in order to weaken the might of the Red Army. It reminded the workers that a strike constituted labor desertion and that the culprits would be dealt with using all the strictness of

⁸⁴ For a short account, see "The Persecution of Socialists by the Bolsheviks during 1920," *Information Bulletin*, no. 31-33 (26 March 1921), 12.

wartime, up to and including execution. A military tribunal under the Tula Cheka was set up to deal with "conspiracy and treason," as the strike was officially referred to now.

On the next day the scene at the tool shop was repeated over and over again. A representative of the plant administration demanded in each workshop that workers resume work immediately, and those who did not were led away by the Cheka. The number of those arrested by the end of the second day of the strike reached several hundred. In response to these mass arrests the workers of the cartridge plant went on strike in solidarity with the armaments plant workers.

Up to this point the chain of events in Tula played out like dozens of strikes across Russia. But then something new and unusual happened in Tula. The Menshevik report on the event characterized it as mass hysteria. Yet it is better to call it mass nonviolent resistance. This movement was started by the Tula women. In large groups they began to congregate in the streets, watching the Cheka lead their arrested husbands to its headquarters. Then some of them pleaded with the Cheka to be arrested as well. This request the Cheka did not turn down. More and more women followed this example and volunteering to be arrested. Then men workers followed suit by publicly expressing solidarity with the arrested workers and volunteered to be arrested as well. In the first four days of the strike the number of those arrested, including volunteers, climbed to at least 10,000 people.

The troika had now overplayed its hand. It could hardly claim that 10,000 Tula workers and their wives were all Polish spies and Black Hundreds. The way the All-Russian Cheka reported these events to Lenin is quite revealing: "Tula: Strike activity has resumed. The workers' demands are selfish and greedy [*shkurnicheskie*]. It is impossible and inadmissible to fulfill them. The province Cheka has adopted tactics of decisive action against the strikers. A number of them have been arrested."⁸⁵ The report never mentioned what these demands were. It failed to reveal the actual number of arrested workers, admitting to having detained only 3,226. Most importantly the tone of the report suggests that the Cheka had the authority to decide, without asking the opinion of the head of government, what kind of workers' demands were admissible. The Cheka had the authority to arrest thousands of workers and only then to inform the leader of the "proletarian" revolution how many were to be shot, drafted, or exiled. It is logical to suggest that if the Cheka had had reason to expect a restraining reaction from Lenin, it would have presented its catalog of repressions as a proposal rather than as an accomplished fact.

The Menshevik faction of the Tula soviet legally assembled for an emergency session in the building of the soviet. They drafted a set of proposals to the soviet on measures to be undertaken to end the strike peacefully by engaging the soviet

⁸⁵ "Informatsionnaia svodka Sekretного otdela Vecheka. 'Tovarishchu Leninu' (1–15 June 1920), Ts.G.A.O.R., Fond 130, SNK, Opis' 3, document 414, p. 3.

and the trade unions. They pointed out that workers did not want to strike but were provoked by the actions of Arsent'ev and the Cheka. Some Bolshevik members of the soviet were swayed by this reasoning and were ready to accept the Menshevik proposals. But that would have put responsibility for the strike on the shoulders of Bolshevik functionaries. To make things worse for themselves, the Mensheviks hinted to the troika and the Cheka that they would inform Martov in Moscow and he would make it public knowledge what was really going on in Tula. The entire fifteen-member Menshevik faction in the soviet was arrested. Even those who did not attend the meeting were seized in their homes at night.⁸⁶

The Bolshevik leaders now had a stake in proceeding with their made-up charges that the strike was in fact a conspiracy. That was their only defense against the wrath of Moscow over the work stoppage at the munitions plant. The troika and the Cheka needed to undercut the Menshevik initiative lest it gain momentum among the rank-and-file Bolsheviks. That could best be accomplished by discovering that the counterrevolutionary nest of conspiracy was in the Menshevik faction of the soviet. Indeed the All-Russian Cheka reported to Lenin that "active Mensheviks" and the "organizers of the strike" had been arrested and exiled.⁸⁷ With the Mensheviks arrested as conspirators and spies, any Bolshevik repeating their arguments on how to achieve a peaceful settlement of the strike could be unmasked as well, as a hidden sympathizer with an internal enemy. One does get an impression that the top people in the soviet, the Cheka, and the factory administration worked well together and covered for one another. Labeling played a social function for them: it secured their uncontrollable dictatorship in Tula. They were in fact members of what one historian has called early Soviet provincial cliques.⁸⁸

G. N. Kaminsky, the chairman of the city soviet Executive Committee, cut short any discussion of negotiations. He was particularly worried by the behavior of Communist workers. Many of them had volunteered to be arrested as well. In fact he admitted that Communist workers were more outspoken in this instance than the Social Democrats. The frame of mind of this chairman of the "Soviet of Workers' Deputies" Executive Committee is well revealed by his own words: "It is necessary to put an end to this once and for all. It is essential to force the workers to submit blindly and obediently to the demands of the authorities."

⁸⁶ This account is based on the extensive report of the Menshevik party committee to the Menshevik Central Committee. The original is "Dokladnaia Zapiska," in Nicolaevsky Collection, series 6, box 5, folder 52. Published in English in Brovkin, ed., *Dear Comrades*, document 36, pp. 198–208.

⁸⁷ "Svodka Informatsionnogo otdela Sekretnogo otdela Vecheka Tovarishchu Leninu. Politicheskie partii i gruppy" (10 August 1920), Ts.G.A.O.R., Fond 130, SNK, Opis' 4, document 268(2), p. 5.

⁸⁸ T. H. Rigby, "Early Provincial Cliques and the Rise of Stalin," *Soviet Studies*, vol. 33, no. 1 (January 1981), 3–28.

Any concessions to workers, he said, might produce a harmful illusion in their minds that all they had to do if they had a grievance was go on strike.

The Cheka's main task was to present the case to Moscow as a conspiracy. To judge by its resolute response to the strike from the very first moments, when a refusal to work meant immediate arrest, it is strange that the Cheka did not arrest the Strike Committee immediately as well—strange, that is, if the strike leaders were dangerous anti-Communists. But the Mensheviks could not have been the leaders of the Strike Committee for two reasons. First, elected Menshevik leaders had already been arrested, and second, they had no inclination to support the strike. In a confidential memorandum on the strike to the Menshevik Central Committee the Tula Mensheviks denied any involvement in the Strike Committee. It is possible that some rank-and-file workers, members of the Menshevik or SR or even Communist parties, played a role in the Strike Committee, but it is more likely that the Strike Committee was set up by the Cheka. Probably the role the Cheka assigned to it was to act as an agent provocateur, that is, to attract active and outspoken workers in order to unmask and remove them later.

Whether or not the Strike Committee was an instrument of the Cheka in the difficult task of unmasking enemies, the Committee for the Liquidation of the Strike was. This committee interrogated hundreds and then thousands of workers on their personal involvement in the strike. Each individual was asked to identify the inciters and troublemakers among the workers who had engineered this case of internal sabotage and subversion. Most workers were released, but they had to sign a confession: "I, the undersigned, a stinking dog and the greatest criminal to appear before the Revolutionary Tribunal and the Red Army, repent for my sins and promise. . . ." ⁸⁹

The Revolutionary Tribunal, chaired by the Cheka chief, tried those identified as inciters and troublemakers and sentenced 28 of them "to hard labor for the duration of wars threatening Soviet power." According to other sources, however, about 200 workers were exiled from Tula. ⁹⁰ The Menshevik faction of the soviet was kept in prison without any charges for at least several months. When and if they were released cannot be ascertained. The Tula Mensheviks' report on the strike to their own party Central Committee, not intended for publication, stated that as a result of the strike the Tula workers were hiding their anger against the Communists but it could erupt again.

The Tula strike manifested all the elements of the Bolshevik mode of action in regard to strikes that we have observed in other cases. The strike was presented as a conspiracy of foreign agents and counterrevolutionaries; it was used as a pretext to arrest legally elected members of the city soviet; no concessions or negotiations were even considered; independent-minded workers were interned

⁸⁹ "Dokladnaia Zapiska," in Nicolaevsky Collection, series 6, box 5, folder 52.

⁹⁰ B. A. Skomorovsky to Axel'rod (25 June 1920), Axelrod Archive.

in a concentration camp; and the remaining workers were forced to confess their sins and swear loyalty to the regime.

It is difficult to estimate how many Russian workers were arrested or dealt with by administrative order for strike actions or expressions of political opinion in 1920. In the few cases we have considered, 80 workers were removed in Ekaterinburg, 180 railroad workers and 150 metalworkers in Petrograd, 100 rail workers at the Ryazan-Urals railroad line and 103 at the Kursk line in Moscow, 152 metalworkers in Bryansk after a strike there, and over 200 in Tula.⁹¹ A few months later a screening and purge was carried out at the Arsenal plant in Kiev. Out of 1,700 workers 600 were dismissed.⁹² This list is certainly not comprehensive.

Secret documents of the local Cheka in Smolensk Province demonstrate that a growing hostility to the Bolsheviks worried the Cheka there too. Its special department in Roslavl', Smolensk Province, reported that "counterrevolution was rearing its head among the masses."⁹³ Every week a Cheka official in every uезд wrote a report to his superior on the political attitudes of the population.⁹⁴ Local party cells were instructed to become auxiliary networks of the Cheka. They discussed all the details of mass surveillance quite openly. The Roslavl' Uezd CP committee in Smolensk Province resolved "to entrust secret work in the garrison to the CP committee member comrade Baranov. The presidium is entrusted with the task of assigning the necessary number of comrades for the purpose of identifying and extracting all undesirable [*neugodnye*] elements."⁹⁵ It was also decided that specific CP committee members would conduct general conversations on political topics in order to facilitate the exposure of hostile elements. In a word the party's task was to identify politically unreliable people, and the Cheka's task to extract them.⁹⁶

A clear pattern emerges from this evidence on the workers' protest movement in different parts of the country: (1) It was explicitly a response to the Communist militarization of labor. (2) It was primarily a defense against abominable economic conditions, malnutrition, and exploitation. (3) By the beginning of 1921 it acquired an explicitly political character reminiscent of 1918, whereby questions of constitutional order overshadowed purely economic demands. (4) The relationship between the ruling party and the workers changed profoundly. It was a relationship of commanders and soldiers on the labor front, as the

⁹¹ Data on Kursk is cited from "Udar v spinu," *Pravda* (12 February 1920).

⁹² "Khronika," *Znamia truda* (the paper of the Left SRs), no. 7 (20 June 1920), 1.

⁹³ "From: Nachal'nik Sekretnoi Operativnoi Chasti Cheka, to: Uezdnyi Komitet RKP(b) gorod Roslavl'" (7 October 1920, top secret), Smolensk Archive, WKP no. 119.

⁹⁴ "Svodka o nastoienii mass uezda za mai mesiaty," *ibid*.

⁹⁵ "Protokol zasedaniia Roslavl'skogo Uezdnogo Komiteta RKP(b)" (10 October 1920), *ibid*.

⁹⁶ The above cited decisions of the Roslavl' Cheka and the Roslavl' CP Committee were apparently made in response to the All-Russian Cheka letter to all provincial CP committees, suggesting that they intensify the struggle against enemies of Soviet power. The original is "Vsem Gubkomam RKP (b)" (8 October 1920), *ibid*.

Bolsheviks put it, or of masters and serfs as some workers saw it. (5) And lastly the workers' movement of 1920 displayed a variety of worker responses to their situation, such as withdrawal from politics, escape to villages, nonviolent resistance, and organized industrial action.

The Communists never negotiated with strikers. It seems their policy was to teach them to obey unconditionally. Those who had seized power in 1917 in the name of the politically conscious proletariat were in fact weeding out all those conscious workers. The Communist rulers felt increasingly isolated in what they saw as the *petit bourgeois* sea of Russia. Hence their desperate attempts to control, intimidate, suppress—and to teach submission. Repression may indeed have been a manifestation of the insecurity and weakness of the Communist party in Russia. But increased repression did not have the desired effect, at least not in 1920. By the fall popular anger was growing not just in the countryside but in the cities as well. As happened so many times during the Russian revolution, a prevailing mood of despair was followed by a rebellious spirit among the Russian workers. Cases of hostile outbursts against the Communist regime were reported among the Putilov plant workers in Petrograd, who were angered by the conviction of 152 workers after the March 1920 strike. Anti-Bolshevik sentiment was also reported among the sailors of Kronstadt and Red Army soldiers, even in the Moscow garrison.⁹⁷ As in 1918, workers and sailors established contact. Their slogan became: For Free Soviets, and some added Without the Communists. As is well known, these slogans became very popular during the crucial strikes at the end of February 1921. Many observers sensed that a serious popular upheaval lay ahead. In October 1920 Martov, in a public interview, predicted prophetically: "Winter will almost definitely provoke an upheaval. Local revolts may easily coalesce and grow to result in grave consequences."⁹⁸

It is widely acknowledged that the Bolshevik regime faced a grave crisis in the winter of 1920–21, a crisis of War Communism. What is often misunderstood, however, is that this upheaval was not a manifestation of War Communism but rather a crisis of what can be called postwar Communism. It was a crisis of the economic and political system established after the collapse of the Whites for a postwar period. The system of industrial relations the Bolsheviks introduced in 1920 was intended to stay for a long historical period to ensure the "normal" functioning of Soviet industry. This system should not be confused with War Communism, an improvisation established during the height of the frontline

⁹⁷ "La proletariat de Petrograd et les Bolsheviki," *La République Russe* (1 August 1920), 3, and Maslov, *Rossiiia posle chetyrekh let revoliutsii*, p. 109; on sailors' discontent, see "Vosstanie matrosov v Petrograde," *Volia Rossii* (7 October 1920), 3; on the Moscow garrison disorders, see Sakwa, *Soviet Communists in Power*, p. 241; on Petrograd garrison mutinies and executions, see American consul in Vyborg to Department of State (17 November 1920), Records, dispatch 861.00.7715.

⁹⁸ "Un Interview de Martov," *La République Russe* (27 October 1920).

civil war with the Whites in 1918 and 1919. The Communism of 1920 vintage had little to do with the Communist theories of Karl Marx or even of the Lenin of 1917. The key feature of Communism in 1920 was not so much nationalization but the militarization of labor. It was a system that reminded observers of the Russian scene of serfdom or of convict labor. The militarization of labor in 1920 meant, in practice, a system of labor exploitation for subsistence rations by a privileged state bureaucracy excluding free markets and trade. Some of its key elements remained permanent features of Soviet life. The Bolshevik revolution that claimed to have liberated labor led in fact to labor being perceived as punishment and to the notion that one's obligation to the state was a burden to be avoided. Hence the culture of stealing and cheating and ripping off the state, which in the end led to the paralysis of the Communist order in the late 1980s. It was against this permanent, postwar Communism that workers, peasants, and sailors rebelled in February 1921. The year 1920, therefore, must be seen as a year of the winding down of the civil war with the Whites and mounting peasant rebellion in the countryside amid escalating strikes in the cities.

The Bolshevik attempt to establish Communism, later called War Communism (in fact postwar Communism), failed. The party was too small to take on such a gigantic task as controlling and supervising every aspect of economic activity in Russia. Yet it never abandoned the claim to be the organizing and leading force in society. It was forced to change the method and speed of its movement toward that goal in March 1921, and that saved it from disaster. In December 1920, however, it was far from clear that the Bolsheviks would come out of this crisis as survivors. A collapse of the Communist order was a realistic possibility. But before we consider the events of February 1921, it is essential to follow the development of the peasant war against the Communists. It was fairly easy to surround factories with Cheka troops and demand obedience. It was far more difficult to do that in thousands of Russian villages. The peasant war against the Communist dictatorship was entering one of its most powerful stages.

The Green Tide

IN EARLY 1920 the civil war was supposed to be over. According to official historiographers, the young republic of workers and peasants was now ready to turn all its attention to socialist construction. The worker and peasant alliance strengthened under the leadership of the vanguard party.¹ The attention of Western historians was focused on the Russo-Polish war, the Red conquest of Crimea, and the economics of War Communism. Continued peasant uprisings such as in Tambov and in southeastern Ukraine have been treated as isolated incidents that did not fundamentally change the accepted chronology of the Russian civil war. Some recent studies have shown, however, that the peasant war in Tambov Province had its counterpart in the Volga area, in Saratov and Simbirsk provinces.² Others have mentioned an enormous peasant uprising in Siberia, which in its magnitude exceeded that of Tambov.³ Nevertheless all these uprisings have been relegated to regional history, and 1920 is still perceived as a year of peace on the internal front.

Nothing could be further from the truth. As the Bolsheviks were claiming that "the civil war" was over and trying to convince Western democracies to lift economic sanctions against the "young Soviet Republic of workers and peasants," their war on peasants was entering one of its bloodiest stages. One cannot put it better than Peter Scheibert: "The real civil war kept on going even after the defeat of the Whites."⁴ Not only in Tambov and southeastern Ukraine, the lower Volga basin and Siberia, but also in central and western Ukraine, Smolensk and Belorussia, Novgorod, Tver, and other provinces outside the black earth region—in a word, everywhere—the peasant war went on. In some areas it ended with burned villages, mass deportations, and famine: a catastrophe from which the peasants never really recovered. Nineteen twenty should properly be called the year of the Green tide. The main question therefore is, Why did the civil war on the internal front have to go on?

In early 1919 the Bolsheviks did not expect that by October the Whites would take Orel on the approaches to Moscow. Similarly in early 1920 they did not

¹ This traditional Soviet interpretation has been repeated even in the perestroika-era scholarship. See Molodtsygin, *Raboche-Krest'ianskii Soiuz, 1918–1920*; Lynn Viola has also written about the worker-peasant alliance during the civil war in *Best Sons of the Fatherland*.

² Figes, *Peasant Russia, Civil War*.

³ Heller and Nekrich, *Utopia in Power*, p. 103, and Conquest, *The Harvest of Sorrow*, p. 52.

⁴ Scheibert, *Lenin an der Macht*, p. 158.

reckon that they would have to face a wide-scale peasant war. They certainly did not intend to launch a crusade against the countryside as they did in 1919 against the cossacks or would do in 1929 against the kulaks. From the Bolshevik perspective their intentions in 1920 were peaceful. They simply wanted to introduce "socialist" relations in the countryside. Peasant war was a by-product of their "peaceful" intentions.

Bolshevik Intentions

Bolshevik policy in the countryside in 1920 pursued essentially one objective. The central government tried to devise a system that would guarantee a stream of food to the cities and to the army. Not all means were acceptable to achieve this objective. The better-off peasants should not benefit at the expense of starving workers. The working class and the cities had to assert their hegemony over the countryside. The influence of market forces had to be reduced to a minimum and if possible eliminated altogether. These fundamental objectives had not changed since 1918. Then, the committees of the poor and class war among peasants were supposed to undercut the grip of the better-off peasants. After a miserable fiasco those policies, it should be recalled, were abolished, and in 1919 the main instrument of grain collection became *prodrazverstka*, which can be defined as a centralized system of grain collection in which a specified target amount of surplus grain is geographically divided into smaller amounts to be levied on each province, district, and village.

Razverstka and Other Obligations

It is sometimes postulated in scholarly literature that the Bolsheviks had to resort to a target collection system because trade was undermined to such an extent that peasants would not have delivered anything to the cities of their own free will. The Bolsheviks had to take food from the peasants, by force if necessary, in order to feed the hungry workers. This was a war emergency, a kind of loan, that later would be repaid. Target collection is conceptualized not as requisition or confiscation but almost as a tax with deferred compensation for "surplus grain."⁵ In fact target collection was neither a tax nor a mere confiscation. It was a war against a "class enemy." The Bolsheviks resorted to a target collection system, that is, requisitioning an arbitrarily set amount of "surplus grain," because the alternative was free trade, which meant a food supply outside their control. To control the cities, they needed to control the distribu-

⁵ For this view, see Lih, "Bolshevik *Razverstka* and War Communism," *Slavic Review*, vol. 45, no. 4 (Winter 1986), 673–89, here 678.

tion of food. To do that they had to requisition from the peasants. To allow free trade meant to tolerate an independent and rich political force in the country. Considerations of political power dictated the choice of economic policy in the countryside and not some ideological commitment to utopian visions.

An attentive examination of the food supply process in 1919 and 1920 suggests that there were alternatives to target collection, but these were unacceptable to the Bolsheviks. Let's us consider the mechanics of the target system by the example of grain-rich Simbirsk Province. Before the war this province exported 12 million pud of grain. So in the summer of 1919 the Bolsheviks apportioned 12 million pud of grain to be raised by a variety of means. The Province Food Supply Committee managed to collect only 40 percent, or close to 5 million pud of grain, mostly because peasants refused to deliver "surplus" grain for nothing. The Province Food Supply Committee estimated that 5 million pud were exported from the province by private tradesmen, that is, the same amount as that raised by the authorities. And of the latter amount only 1,700,000 pud were sent to the center; the rest was needed to cover the needs of the province.⁶ Much went to support collection detachments and other bureaucracies. So private traders managed to bring more grain to the markets of big cities than the Bolshevik authorities, despite enormous efforts, intimidation, and shootings.

Local authorities in Simbirsk complained that if private trade continued unimpeded, all the peasant grain would disappear into the private market.⁷ So the Bolsheviks intensified the war against private traders. They seized them at the stations, confiscated their possessions, interrogated them to obtain the names of peasants who had sold them produce, and then confiscated the traders' money and imposed heavy fines on those peasants.⁸ The act of selling became a criminal offense. By these actions, of course, the Bolshevik created a reputation for themselves as people who wanted to get something for nothing. This only strengthened the peasants' demands for free trade. Free trade functioned, and it certainly was an alternative. But then what would the local Bolsheviks be in charge of?

In 1919 the Bolsheviks' grip on the countryside was very tenuous. In 1920 they had a large armed force at their disposal after the rout of the Whites. The gist of their policy was more of the same, only trying harder. The Bolsheviks were well aware, from the experience of 1918–19, that a reliance on poor peasants was ineffective, and they reverted to dealing with the peasant community as a whole. Grain was to be gathered on the basis of collective responsibility. An entire village, as represented by leaders of the mir, was responsible for delivering its apportioned target. The key institution in this hierarchy was the Provincial Food Supply Committee. It coordinated activities of the uezd

⁶ All these data are from Kaganovich, *Kak dostaetsia khleb*, pp. 12–13.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

food supply committees, and those in turn supervised the work of volost' committees, which dealt with each village in their jurisdiction. A prominent Bolshevik, often a member of the Central Committee, usually headed the province committee. Under his command food supply detachments were dispatched to various parts of the province wherever the need for armed force arose. This system made it possible to enforce grain collection from a large area with a relatively small force. If peasants rose in rebellion, larger forces were requested from the center to suppress what was commonly referred to as a White Guardsists' conspiracy. Every uezd and volost' committee chairman was personally responsible for the collection and delivery of his specified target. He faced severe penalties for failure to deliver. On the other hand he had far-reaching authority over the lower-standing committees. He could shoot subordinate executives for "sabotage" or complicity with the Green bandits, he could take hostages from among the peasants, and so on.⁹

Since the target amount was supposed to be based on the amount of grain in the peasants' possession, the higher the surplus, the more would be taken away. In practice the commissars had a plan to fulfill regardless of where that quota came from or whether the actual amount of grain available equaled the calculated "surplus" or not. As a result seed grain was often taken to fulfill the plan. In addition to meeting collection targets, peasants were obligated to deliver grain to specified collection centers in their own carts, hence the term cart obligation. On numerous occasions peasants and peasant women were mobilized for all kinds of repair projects, hence the labor obligation (*povinnost'*). This was in addition to the draft obligation. The central government was worried that peasants were reducing the acreage of cultivated land. The Bolsheviks' solution was to squeeze more out of the peasants and to force them to maintain current levels of cultivation. For this purpose in November 1920 they decided to create sowing committees. The state would take the sowing campaign into its own hands. The government announced that sowing would become a labor obligation for peasants, so that they would not be able to "sabotage" the sowing campaign. The plan was called state regulation of the peasant economy.¹⁰

Each peasant commune was responsible for delivery of a specified number of young men for the army draft. In the northwestern wooded provinces peasants were obligated to cut and deliver wood to rail stations and river ports. The campaign to procure heating wood for the cities in the winter of 1920 is a revealing illustration of the Bolsheviks' utilitarian approach to peasants. The Bolsheviks had a problem: there was no firewood. To create economic incentives for peasants or merchants to bring it to the cities was not the Bolshevik way;

⁹ Kaganovich cites the list of measures, *ibid.*, p. 32.

¹⁰ The sowing campaign was inaugurated by Osinskii on 27 November 1920: "Novyi experiment kommunistov nad krestianskoi Rossiei," *Volia Rossii* (30 December 1920), 1. See also Lars T. Lih, "The Bolshevik Sowing Committees of 1920: Apotheosis of War Communism," *The Carl Beck Papers in Russian and East European Studies*, paper 803.

to wage a military campaign on the woodcutting front was. So the party mobilized workers and sent them to the countryside to chop wood with enthusiasm. Peasants were simply given orders that everyone from eighteen to sixty years of age had to deliver his woodcutting obligation.¹¹ Forests were devastated; much was lost on the way or could not be transported. A lot of noise, a lot of waste, and not much practical gain—this was the fate of many Bolshevik campaigns.

The central authorities also attempted to preserve the most productive and efficient landlords' estates in grain-producing provinces. For this purpose they created state farms in place of old estates. The state farms were run by state-appointed managers and often employed imported labor, mostly conscripted army soldiers, because local peasants viewed state farms with hostility and stayed away from them. During the height of "War Communism," the Bolsheviks were quite enthusiastic about state farms. Well anticipating Stalin's visions, V. P. Miliutin dreamed in 1919 about food "factories" producing grain, meat, milk, and fodder. That, he believed, would free the socialist state from economic dependence on peasants.¹² Typically in a black earth area the number of state farms hovered around 100; in Petrograd province there were 140, in Moscow 201; yet the largest state farms in acreage were in the lower Volga black earth provinces (Voronezh, Saratov, Samara). In some cases these state farms controlled and employed the entire population of an entire volost', with thousands of employees, former peasants. At least in theory state farms offered a solution to just about everything. The state would become independent of the whims of the peasant market, modern mechanized agriculture would replace antiquated forms of production, and peasants could be drawn toward collective and state-run agriculture. The Communist Central Committee instructed all province party committees to strengthen state and collective farms as outposts of socialist agriculture.¹³

All these institutions—grain collection detachments, punitive detachments, sowing committees, state farms, and labor armies—were designed to eliminate the market mechanism in food supply and to free the Bolshevik government from what it perceived as peasant sabotage, that is, the ability to withhold their product. The Bolsheviks, at the time, referred to these policies and institutions as Communist (as opposed to capitalist relations in the countryside, which these new institutions were supposed to replace and undermine). Individual free choice to produce or not to produce, to sell or not to sell and at what price, was a capitalist holdover which had to be replaced by collective responsibility to produce and deliver at the time and place the state dictated. The Bolsheviks invented the term War Communism later, when the New Economic Policy

¹¹ Scheibert, *Lenin an der Macht*, p. 174.

¹² Figs, *Peasant Russia, Civil War*, p. 297.

¹³ "K posevnoi kampanii. Vsem gubkomam," *Vestnik agitatsii i propagandy*, no. 7-8 (4 March 1920), 18.

was in place, in order to explain away their dictatorship by references to the civil war. In fact Bolshevik agrarian policies in 1920 were explained at the time not by military exigencies but as a matter of principle. Moreover any attempts by moderates to introduce at least an orderly system of grain collection were resisted. Martov wrote to a colleague that in the summer of 1920 at a conference of food supply personnel, "several people made a feeble attempt to raise the question of changing the entire system of food levy in terms of collecting a definite progressive food products tax from peasants so that they could dispose of the rest of the grain freely. But the Communists vetoed the proposal, and it was not even on the agenda."¹⁴ In March 1921, on the eve of the New Economic Policy, there was no indication that Communist objectives in the countryside had changed. All province committees were instructed to involve peasants in socialist construction by means of labor conscription, to promote the transition to collective agriculture, to limit trade, and to mold a new kind of peasant (*perevospitat'*) by work in labor armies.¹⁵ Even if these institutions and policies had worked without abuse and distortions, this "War Communism" appears to be amazingly similar in some of its key elements to serfdom. The peasants had to surrender a portion of their labor and products to the landlord. Yet the practical implementation of "War Communism" made the real conditions in the countryside, as we shall see, surpass in their brutality and arbitrariness the serfdom of the eighteenth century.

The Collection of Tribute

The target grain collection system, even if it functioned without abuse, was bound to lead to a decrease of cultivated land and to famine. The problem with the Bolshevik system was that the targets were often arbitrary. As a recent study showed, collection targets were deliberately set higher than the estimated harvest surplus.¹⁶ In Simbirsk Province the province Food Supply Committee did not know what the acreage of cultivated land was in various uyezdy or what crops were sown or what the yields were. The targets were assigned by intuition, attested a Bolshevik commissar.¹⁷ The Bolshevik authorities considered conducting a search of each and every household in Simbirsk Province, of which there were 308,743. But this undertaking was beyond their capabilities. The easiest way out was to enforce the requisition of a target amount from each uезд, volost', and village.

¹⁴ Iu. O. Martov to A. N. Stein (4 August 1920), Nicolaevsky Collection, series 17, box 51, folder 13-14.

¹⁵ "Partiino-Sovetskaia Shkola. Vsem Gubkomam RKP(b). Politika Sovetskoi Vlasti v sel'skom khoziaistve," *Vestnik agitatsii i propagandy*, no. 7-8 (4 March 1921), 49.

¹⁶ Figes, *Peasant Russia, Civil War*, p. 268.

¹⁷ Kaganovich, *Kak dostaetsia khleb*, p. 8.

At every level, from Moscow down to the volost' level, targets were "adjusted." As a letter from Saratov Province related, telegrams from Moscow demanded that grain collectors "urgently send a train for the starving capitals."¹⁸ Pressure from the center generated pressure on the local collectors. They in turn "adjusted" the targets for collection to suit their needs. Food collection detachments also adjusted these arbitrary targets to have their own cut. In Simbirsk Province, for example, more than five thousand men took part in various detachments.¹⁹ A grain collection detachment from Tula in Saratov Province was particularly notorious. It was nicknamed "iron broom": "From those peasants who tried to hide even as little as a pud of grain, they took everything, to the last cup of grain. They requisitioned everything they could put their hands on."²⁰ Even when peasants delivered 100 percent of their target allotment, they were not safe. As a letter from Saratov explained, the Volga Germans paid everything in full. But the local authorities reasoned that if they had delivered everything right away, that meant that they had more, so the Bolsheviks returned for additional tribute. "They behaved in the German colonies as in a conquered country. They were engaged in pure robbery, took away whatever they pleased in a drunken stupor, and tried to 'court' local girls."²¹ Forty percent of the grass cereal harvest was requisitioned. Children were in some cases taken away and offered back for ransom.²² Local people referred to these detachments as new *oprichniki* (Ivan the Terrible's punitive troops). In neighboring Tsaritsyn the Cheka reported that the authorities were guilty of "abuse of power, bribery, drunkenness, unruly behavior [*buistvo*], and embezzlement of people's property, as well as [extralegal] requisitions and confiscations."²³ One peasant from Smolensk Province wrote in a letter to his son: "The comrades have robbed us all completely without any distinction as to whether you have something or not."²⁴

Much of the requisitioned property never reached Moscow, of course. A young officer wrote from Smolensk Province that collected grain was stored carelessly. Due to negligence the losses were enormous. The Cheka discovered that large quantities of food vanished simultaneously from state warehouses in Ekaterinburg, Voronezh, and Petrograd (where two suspects were detained,

¹⁸ "Esero-Men'shevistskoe vosstanie (pis'mo iz Saratova)," handwritten letter (12 July 1921), PSR Archive, document 2030.

¹⁹ Kaganovich, *Kak dostaeisia khleb*, pp. 7–8.

²⁰ "Esero-Men'shevistskoe vosstanie (pis'mo iz Saratova)," PSR Archive, document 2030. Another report devoted to this notorious detachment from Tula is by Babine; see Raleigh, ed., *A Russian Civil War Diary*, p. 183.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Figs, *Peasant Russia, Civil War*, p. 272.

²³ "Informatsionnaia Svodka Sekretnogo Otdela Vecheka tovarishchu Leninu" (26 October–November 1920), Ts.G.A.O.R., Fond 130, SNK, Opis' 3, document 414, p. 20.

²⁴ Scheibert, *Lenin an der Macht*, p. 386.

both Communists).²⁵ On top of all that Red Army units in provinces adjacent to the front line continued as in 1919 to rob peasants. Lenin scribbled a note in July 1920: "About rations. We must set about it in earnest. The army is poaching outrageously."²⁶ Lenin must have reached this conclusion by reading weekly Cheka reports, which cataloged countless examples of willfulness and abuse by both military and civilian authorities. In the judgment of the Special Department (*osobyi otdel*) of the Seventh Army, stationed in the western provinces: "everywhere you look, you see one uninterrupted chain of crimes. . . . Every chief of the Supply Department is trying to surround himself by his personal friends. . . . as a result: speculation, theft, and sabotage." An unidentified uezd party committee in this report was defined as "a gang of hangers-on, who have stuck like leeches to Communism in order to enrich themselves."²⁷

On the grounds that Kursk Province exported 15 million pud before the war, the collection target for 1920 was set at 10 million pud of grain. But only half of this target was reached. Telegrams from Moscow and plenipotentiary commissars arrived. Everything was set into motion to fulfill the "combat mission."²⁸ And yet much of the requisitioned grain disappeared, which led the Cheka to report: "The work of the food supply agency was conducted in a criminal fashion."²⁹ Some commanders often referred to themselves in front of peasants as a tsar and lord.³⁰ A Socialist Revolutionary observer wrote from Tambov Province that the commander of the grain collection detachment told peasants that he could do anything to them, show mercy or punish (*pomiluet i pokaraet*).³¹

These voices of local commanders are an important indicator of their motivations and their mentality. It has been suggested that their zeal was a manifestation of profound commitment to the cause of the revolution.³² But the grain collectors' zeal was hardly to relieve "the starving proletariat" in Moscow or to engage in building socialism; it was, more prosaically, to enrich themselves at the expense of the defenseless population. Most of these people were

²⁵ "Informatsionnaia Svodka Sekretного Otdela Vecheka tovarishchu Leninu" (7–14 February 1920), Ts.G.A.O.R., Fond 130, SNK, Opis' 3, document 414, p. 10.

²⁶ "Exchange of Notes between Comrades Lenin and Skliansky at a Meeting" (27–31 July 1920), *Trotsky Papers*, vol. 2, p. 234.

²⁷ "Obzor polozheniia na Zapadnom fronte. Informatsionnaia Svodka Sekretного Otdela Vecheka tovarishchu Leninu" (1–15 April 1920), Ts.G.A.O.R., Fond 130, SNK, Opis' 3, document 414, pp. 3–4.

²⁸ "Kurskaia guberniia" (May 1921), *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 10 (July 1921), 25–26.

²⁹ "Informatsionnaia Svodka Sekretного Otdela Vecheka tovarishchu Leninu" (1–15 June 1920), Ts.G.A.O.R., Fond 130, SNK, Opis' 3, document 414, p. 20.

³⁰ Scheibert, *Lenin an der Macht*, p. 386.

³¹ "Tambovskie krestiane i vlast," *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 14–15 (November–December 1921), 31–32.

³² Figes, *Peasant Russia, Civil War*, pp. 273–74.

clear-cut opportunists who had joined the ruling party exclusively to enjoy the benefits of rule. Out of 11,133 Communist party members in Tambov Province 7,297 entered the party at the end of 1919 during an unrestricted membership drive.³³ It seems that what they all wanted to demonstrate most is that they were the *vlast'*, the authority. In that sense the upward mobility they gained from the Bolsheviks made them reliable instruments of the new regime. On the other hand it seems that most of them acted not out of ideological commitment to Bolshevism but out of a desire to promote themselves, their power over others, and their material well-being, without tilling the land or standing on the factory floor. They preferred the role of a master, or tsar and lord as they put it.

Bolshevik methods of grain collection necessitated a reliance on these types. This in turn created a powerful constituency in the party-state of people who had a vested interest in arbitrary rule. Any criticism of their actions immediately triggered accusations of treason. At the election meeting of the Varpel'skaia volost (Tambov Province) soviet Executive Committee peasants resisted electing a Communist and insisted that "the people and not you, the Communists, should elect." A Communist, Inshakov, yelled back: "Denikinites, Antonovites. Those like you, we will wipe off the face of the earth."³⁴ Uprisings of "Green bandits" and other types of exposure to danger, when reported to Moscow, made these commanders seem indispensable to Moscow and enhanced their freedom of action. Being tough and ruthless was beneficial.

Those local commanders, plenipotentiaries, and uezd committee members are an interesting social group of semiliterate rural upstarts who were no longer peasants, but neither were they urban. They learned fast how to use the right phraseology of the proletarian revolution and socialism—such as White Guardist, Green bandit, petit bourgeois conspiracy, paid for by the British agents—but their tastes and behavior were not "socialist," whatever that means, but rather manifestations of deeply internalized notions of what a strong *vlast'* was all about.³⁵ A strong government in their view was by its very nature arbitrary and unilateral, like the power of the tsar. Asking questions, subjecting the government to scrutiny—these democratic impulses they perceived as challenges to their authority. The purpose of government in their view was to ensure obedience, not the common good or a participatory consensus of the community. We have a link here between Bolshevik "class" ruthlessness and Russian peasant-upstart dictatorial ethics.

³³ Report to the SR Central Committee from Tambov, here section "Obshchepoliticheskie usloviia zhizni," *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 3 (February 1921), 24.

³⁴ "Kommunisty na rabote. (Pis'mo krestianina iz Tambovskoi gubernii)," *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 5 (April 1921), 25–28, here 26.

³⁵ Richard Pipes discusses peasant attitudes to authority in *The Russian Revolution*, p. 119.

The more authority a Communist had, the more he tried to get out of it for himself. Agents from the province capital supervising elections to the local soviet, agents supervising the work of mills, and other representatives of the center were often ready to sell permits of all kinds. In the village of Borisovka (Tambov Province) the inspector from the uezd center caught the mill of Fedor Pushnin milling when it was not supposed to be. He threatened to shut it down but changed his mind after a handsome bribe.³⁶ The rules and regulations of "War Communism" were a source of revenue for Communist state bureaucrats.

Release from, or postponement of, the military draft was a standard bribe item for local functionaries. In Mordovskaia and Novonikol'skaia volosti of Tambov Province everyone knew the prices: 80,000 rubles for a two-month draft delay and 160,000 for an indefinite release from the draft.³⁷ And in Saratov Province the Cheka reported a widespread falsification of documents releasing people from the army draft.³⁸ The more bureaucracies the Bolsheviks created, the more widespread was the corruption. Pervasive corruption of local officials was of course nothing new in Russia. In the decades under Brezhnev it became an essential feature of the Soviet system of government. The difference between corrupt officials in Brezhnev's and in Lenin's Russia is that under Brezhnev local officials understood that enriching themselves at the expense of the state constituted theft. In 1920, however, enriching themselves at the expense of the population under their control was understood as a normal part of government. Officials perceived their jurisdiction as their patrimony, *votchina*; it was theirs to rule for a price to be delivered to Moscow. They had to cheat Moscow, and they were convinced that peasants were bound to cheat them. Hence ruthless and firm measures had to be applied to stamp out the peasants' cheating and "hoarding."

Statistical calculations demonstrate that collection targets, for example in Samara and Saratov provinces, deliberately exceeded estimates of harvest surpluses, on the assumption that the peasantry would conceal up to 30 percent of their actual surplus grain.³⁹ As a result stocks of seed were depleted, cultivated acreage shrank, and famine struck with devastating consequences a year later. The so-called "War Communism" in the countryside, on closer examination, was a rule of military and "party" cliques whose *raison d'être* was to "pump out" grain from the countryside for the state and for themselves by barbaric means that can be likened only to a collection of tribute from a conquered country in medieval times.

³⁶ "Kommunisty na rabote," *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 5 (April 1921), 25–28, here 26.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ "Informatsionnaia Svodka Sekretного Otdela Vecheka tovarishchu Leninu" (26 October–November 1920), Ts.G.A.O.R., Fond 130, SNK, Opis' 3, document 414, p. 22.

³⁹ Figes, *Peasant Russia, Civil War*, p. 268.

Informal, Invisible Peasant Government

Two main changes distinguished the sociopolitical situation in the countryside in 1920. In 1918 and in 1919 Soviet power existed primarily along railroad lines. Bolshevik agents and detachments appeared, requisitioned, and disappeared. In 1920, however, provincial authorities began to unfold a network of institutions enveloping the peasant community more than ever before. The Bolshevik presence in the countryside, for the first time, could be called permanent. The Bolsheviks relied on the peasant commune as a key institution to deliver the target quantity of food. They made the village commune collectively responsible for the failure of individual members to deliver. Under the threat of severe penalties the commune had to enforce the demands of the center. That may have been an effective method of grain collection, but it had an undesirable effect for the Bolsheviks. The real power of the village assembly was enhanced. So on the one hand there were scores of central and local Communist bureaucracies, commissars, party cells, and detachments, but on the other the village assembly. The best term to describe this structure of political authority in 1920 is that of dual power.

The Bolshevik rural government was formal and visible. The peasant government was informal and invisible. The village commune should not be seen as some kind of idealized union of equal peasants who resisted in a spirit of brotherhood the invasion of the Communists. This myth of the good commune and the bad Bolsheviks was actually propagated by SR observers still loyal to their age-old desire to serve the great Russian *narod*. The real situation of power relations was much more complex. The village commune was a network of leading families enforcing compliance, entering into deals with local authorities, supporting the Green rebels, and joining the Communist administration. In a word they did all kinds of seemingly contradictory things, which added up to essentially one goal: to defend the existing, traditional way of life and power relations in the countryside.

Clusters of leading families had all kinds of informal networks of communication on the level of the *volost'* and even the *uezd*. P. K. Kaganovich, a food supply commissar in Simbirsk Province, believed that there were not more than five or ten leading "kulak" families in a village, whose authority was binding on all others.⁴⁰ Everybody knew everybody else in the immediate vicinity. If an outsider appeared, he was immediately identified. His accent alone would reveal him. Returned soldiers were quickly absorbed into the peasant community, and better-off peasants reasserted their leadership after the failure of the committees of the poor.⁴¹ For a local peasant to join the Communist party was

⁴⁰ Kaganovich, *Kak dostaetsia khleb*, p. 10.

⁴¹ Roger Pethbridge, "Social and Political Attitudes of the Peasantry in Kursk Guberniia at the Start of NEP," *SEER*, vol. 63, no. 3 (July 1985), 373–87, here 383.

a very risky undertaking. It was perceived as a challenge to the village assembly. It was tantamount to a declaration of being an agent of the city authorities in the village. The risk of being killed was high indeed.

The village commune lived by its own unwritten laws. Peer pressure was adequate to enforce the compliance of individual members. There are numerous examples showing that those venturesome local upstarts who did join the Bolsheviks and decided to take the risk of being perceived as agents of the center in fact led double lives. They delivered a tribute to the center, enriched themselves at the expense of the local community, bribed higher-standing bosses (*nachal'stvo*), and at the same time maintained links with Green rebels in the forests. A case in point we have observed in 1919 in Smolensk Province, when a local dictator warned the local Greens that a punitive detachment was coming to the village. The Reds were going to leave but he had to stay, he reasoned. Warning the Greens was his insurance policy.

This incident demonstrates the complex nature of power relations in the countryside. The Bolsheviks had the power to requisition and take hostages; the Greens had the power to ambush these detachments, to be supplied, hidden, protected, and warned by "Communist" officials about the actions of the center. It should not be assumed therefore that any and every person listed on paper as a Communist in the countryside was necessarily and exclusively an agent of the center. Even by Soviet official data there were not more than 10 percent Communists at the volost' level in the countryside. In Simbirsk Province there were only three party cells at the uezd level and none at the volost' or village level.⁴² Most village and volost' soviets were actually defending peasant interests, lamented Food Supply Commissar Kaganovich. He wanted to turn them into tools of the center. Some village soviets were arrested for refusal to deliver target amounts.⁴³ In Pskov Province, for example, "primarily deserters were elected to the village soviets and consumer cooperatives."⁴⁴

The village assembly was not an equal partner in the chain of authority but a hostage of the Communist government. Naturally in such a structure peasant leaders were going to try to do as little as possible of what was required of them by the center, and if there was some other force that would ease the burden, they would extend their patronage to that force. In some areas peasant communes, village soviets, and deserters were all linked together, as a Cheka report from Voronezh explained: "Recently the Green army has been growing. Persistent deserters are organizing themselves and are beginning to act decisively. In the neighborhood of Valuiki Township 50,000 deserters are hiding. . . . They attack units of the Thirteenth Army. . . . The local population and local

⁴² Kaganovich, *Kak dostaetsia khleb*, p. 15.

⁴³ Ibid., pp. 17–18.

⁴⁴ "Informatsionnaia Svodka Sekretnogo Otdela Vecheka tovarishchu Leninu" (1–10 October 1920), Ts.G.A.O.R., Fond 130, SNK, Opis' 3, document 414, p. 1.

authorities aid the deserters.”⁴⁵ That is why the Green bands in 1920 should be seen as an armed wing of the village assembly. The lines between the two were blurred. Some peasants went away to join the Greens in the forests, and others stayed in village soviets and helped them, as for example in Perm Province: “Desertion has not diminished. In Uralsk Uezd armed deserters are hiding in the forests. They ambush food supply detachments, the policemen, and engage in robberies. In many volost’ executive committees the chairmen hide the deserters.”⁴⁶

On the other hand local leaders of the peasant community found ways of cooperating with the Bolsheviks. As one observer from Tambov Province commented, most non-Communist members of the Breznigovatskaia Volost’ Executive Committee “hated the Communists,” and yet they tried “to make friends” with members of the volost’ Communist cell, which meant in practice getting drunk together.⁴⁷ The “friendship” of politically active elements with power holders was essentially a cooptation technique. In other cases cooptation did not work, and open clashes broke out. In Ufa Province, for example, the chairman of the volost’ soviet and the head of the police attacked the local party cell.⁴⁸ If political authority changed, these same people would start a “friendship” with the new bosses (*nachal’s tvo*). In Kursk Province, for example, village soviet chairmen renamed themselves “elders” (*starosta*) as the Whites approached in 1919.⁴⁹ Moreover the same people who had been running “state” grain collection in 1920 for the Bolsheviks went into the private grain trade in 1921, retaining positions of leadership and influence. Their “Communism” evaporated as soon as they could go into private business.

Volost’- and uezd-level Communists also had to adapt to the informal authority of village leaders. Of course they had the means to disband executive committees of uezd soviets if those showed outward insubordination. They often did and appointed revolutionary committees instead. Yet this was not enough to enforce compliance. Faced with widespread “sabotage,” local authorities had to play along. As one report from a southern Russian province related, the peasants’ outright hostility to the sowing committees put the local Communists in a tough spot. They covered up their failure to enforce compliance and reported to the center that everything had gone as required.⁵⁰ The village community showed resilience and adaptability throughout this period.

⁴⁵ “Svodka VOKHRY” (troops of Internal Security), no. 298 (28 September 1920), in *Informatsionnaia Svodka Sekretnogo Otdela Vecheka tovarishchu Leninu* (1–10 October 1920), Ts.G.A.O.R., Fond 130, SNK, Opis’ 3, document 414, p. 20.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁴⁷ “Kommunisty na rabote,” *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 5 (April 1921), 25–28, here 26.

⁴⁸ “Informatsionnaia Svodka Sekretnogo Otdela Vecheka tovarishchu Leninu” (1–15 August 1920), Ts.G.A.O.R., Fond 130, SNK, Opis’ 3, document 414.

⁴⁹ Roger Pethbridge, “Social and Political Attitudes of the Peasantry in Kursk Guberniia at the Start of NEP,” *SEER*, vol. 63, no. 3 (July 1985), 373–87, here 380.

⁵⁰ “Na mestakh,” *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 10 (July 1921), 24–25.

Peasant Perceptions

To say that the peasant detested the Communists is to state the obvious. Lenin and the Cheka were well aware of this simple fact because week after week, month after month, they read endless reports like these:

Vyatka: Nellinskii and Glazovskii Uezd: the attitude of peasants toward Soviet power is sharply hostile.

Perm: The disposition of the population is counterrevolutionary.⁵¹

Kuban: The mood of the population is counterrevolutionary.⁵²

Tomsk: The attitude toward the Communists is hostile. During the first half of July rebellions broke out often which embraced the entire province.

The Urals: The attitude of the population and of the workers toward Soviet power is hostile.

Kazan: The attitude of the population toward Soviet power is unfriendly due to the pumping out of grain.

Samara: Discontent is on the rise among peasants. Shows itself in peasant unrest.⁵³

Voronezh: The attitude of population toward Soviet power is hostile.⁵⁴

Tsaritsyn: In the entire province the attitude of the population toward Soviet power and the Communist party is relatively hostile.⁵⁵

Very often accounts of conversations with peasants referred to their perceptions of Communists as landlords (*pomeshchiki*). Indeed the nature of their relations with the authorities reminded peasants of their relations with landlords. They had to deliver arbitrarily apportioned "surplus" grain to the authorities for nothing. Peasants knew well that the alternative was to sell it on the free market. They perceived the Bolsheviks as those who wanted to cheat them out of just rewards for their labor. As Kaganovich observed in Simbirsk Province: "peasants crave free trade and are seriously infected by the instinct of private property."⁵⁶ What caused universal hatred were the labor and cart obligations. Peasants in a village in Tambov Province demanded at their assembly that the authorities: "put an end to the serfdom of horses and men from this day onward."⁵⁷

Even in the best of circumstances relations between peasants and state farms

⁵¹ "Informatsionnaia Svodka Sekretnogo Otdela Vecheka tovarishchu Leninu" (1–15 July 1920), Ts.G.A.O.R., Fond 130, SNK, Opis' 3, document 414, p. 2.

⁵² Ibid. (16–31 July 1920), p. 2.

⁵³ Ibid. (1–15 August 1920), pp. 1–2.

⁵⁴ Ibid. (1–10 October 1920), p. 2.

⁵⁵ Ibid. (23 October–1 November), p. 3.

⁵⁶ Kaganovich, *Kak dostaetsia khleb*, p. 9.

⁵⁷ This demand was published in *Tambovskie Izvestiia*, no. 75 (1921), cited here from "Tambovskie krestiane i vlast'," *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 14–15 (November–December 1921), 31–33.

were bound to be tense.⁵⁸ Peasants perceived them with hostility and suspicion because outsiders, including agricultural workers and sometimes conscripted soldiers from the labor armies, were brought in to work on these farms. What made things much worse was that the Bolsheviks gave state farms the authority to mobilize peasants for work at the farms when needed. Of course they were needed most when the peasants had to work in their own fields. On several occasions in Tambov Province state farms mobilized women, which understandably generated the hostility of peasants. Conscripted peasants worked poorly on state farms, which enraged the manager of a state farm in Novonikolskaia Volost', who, according to an eyewitness, threatened the peasants on his farm with a revolver.⁵⁹ Clearly Bolshevik state farms, with their conscripted labor and loudmouthed commissars, were very different from noble agricultural estates. In fact specialists related that, for a job that used to be done by one man, now the manager sent four or five labor army soldiers. However, the frame of reference for peasants was the situation under the tsar, and even earlier under serfdom. For them Bolshevik state farms and conscription for work at "socialist" enterprises evoked images of hated serfdom. Hence their violent reaction, as the Cheka described in the case of Tambov peasants: "Due to unlawful and criminal actions of the food supply detachments enforcing target grain collection, whereby the belongings of many people were confiscated, threats and many arbitrary arrests were made, the attitude of the toiling peasantry toward Soviet power is negative, and to the Communist party hostile. All this is creating preconditions for widespread uprisings."⁶⁰ When partisan warfare flared up in the black earth region and in Ukraine, the first thing the peasants did was burn or destroy state farms as symbols of the old and the new serfdom.⁶¹ In Saratov Province, for example, during the first half of 1921 peasant insurgents destroyed fifteen *kommunii* (communes) and thirty-four collective farms.⁶²

Although these attitudes were prevalent in all parts of the country, regional differences in the mode and dynamics of resistance were enormous. The key to understanding the differences is that peasant attitudes in various parts of the country reflected local conditions. There was no one national peasant voice but rather a variety of voices which reflected a variety of trajectories in peasant political behavior. In the central European Russian provinces peasants never saw the Whites, and the only enemies they knew were the local commissars. Outward control of the railways, towns, and villages was in Communist hands.

⁵⁸ Lih, *Bread and Authority in Russia*, p. 206.

⁵⁹ "Kommunisty na rabote," *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 5 (April 1921), 25–28, here 28.

⁶⁰ "Informatsionnaia Svodka Sekretnogo Otdela Vecheka tovarishchu Leninu" (1–15 July 1920), Ts.G.A.O.R., Fond 130, SNK, Opis' 3, document 414, p. 1.

⁶¹ "Krestianstvo Ukrainy," *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 8 (May 1921), 25–27.

⁶² Figes, *Peasant Russia, Civil War*, p. 307.

The nature of dual power was such that the village assembly was on the defensive trying to frustrate the onslaught of the center.

In the outlying areas and especially in the newly conquered territories, such as Ukraine, cossack lands, and Siberia, Bolshevik control was what it had been in central Russia in 1919, mainly along railroad lines and primarily in the form of military occupation. The Communists had not had time to envelop these huge areas with a network of detachments, cells, and committees. All the Bolsheviks could do was to appear in the countryside in force, but they did not have the resources or the manpower to occupy every village and install a permanent administration there. In Ukraine and cossack lands peasant hatred for the *kommuniia* was exacerbated by the nationality factor. As numerous observers reported, Ukrainian peasants perceived Moscow commissars as foreigners robbing their country. The concept "foreign" should be placed in the proper historical context here. It seems that for peasants *foreign* meant to be not from here, alien, not ours. It had little to do with modern ideas of statehood or patriotism. Muscovites were foreign because they were urban, spoke a different language (hard to understand), and were out to rob the countryside.

Ukrainian peasant attitudes were much more hostile to the city. Cities were perceived as enemy camps, headquarters of Russians and Jews. As one observer related, peasants told him that it would be nice to "surround the cities by barbed wire and let them all die of hunger there."⁶³ The Ukrainian countryside had been the battlefield of German and White and Red and Polish armies in 1918–20. This generated hostility to all "foreigners" (anyone from outside) and to any kind of authority. The very word *vlast'* implied for Ukrainian peasants conscriptions, requisitions, and all kinds of obligations. These attitudes made the character of Ukrainian peasant warfare somewhat different from that of the Russian peasants.

In Kuban and in Siberia the spring of 1920 was a honeymoon between the Bolsheviks and the peasants. Atrocities committed by retreating bands of Denikin's and Kolchak's soldiers were still fresh in the peasants' memory, and in most places peasants greeted the Reds as liberators. The honeymoon did not last long, however, and only a few months later partisan detachments resumed their warfare, this time against the Bolsheviks. We shall follow the cycles of peasant protest, so similar in their stages but so much out of tune with each other.

Peasant Resistance: Central Russia

Peasants are very patient people. In 1920 they were mostly concerned with their farms, families, and security. What they wanted most was to be left alone.

⁶³ "Krestianstvo Ukrainy," *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 8 (May 1921), 25–27.

Recourse to armed resistance was their last resort. In some areas it was an act of desperation and in others a well-coordinated war effort. It is difficult to distinguish between peace and war in the Russian countryside of 1920. Can it be called peace when the central authorities took hostages, when they arrested and executed peasants routinely for failure to comply with the demands of the center? Was it peace when peasants in return sabotaged labor and army conscription, burned state estates, and disassembled rail tracks? The best way to describe this situation is low-intensity warfare. From there it was only a small step to high-intensity war in the fall of 1920 and the winter–spring of 1921, involving huge peasant armies and Red Army divisions, punitive expeditions, artillery shellings of villages, aerial bombardments, concentration camps, and mass deportations.

Peasants resorted to a variety of traditional forms of resistance. The most potent weapon was a peasant strike, that is, refusal to work. In practical terms it meant a refusal to cultivate land beyond the immediate needs of the peasant household. Specific calculations for various provinces differ, depending on climate, demography, local government policy, and so on. Yet the overall trend for grain-producing Russia was unmistakable: a considerable decline of cultivated land. In the lower Volga region, for example, one of the most important grain-producing areas before the war, the amount of land devoted to wheat, the main crop, fell by 35.5% in Samara and by 47.8% in Saratov Province by 1921.⁶⁴ According to the Central Statistical Administration, the total area of cultivated land in European Russia diminished by 28 percent, or by some other calculations by 38 percent.⁶⁵ According to a calculation distinguishing between producing and consuming provinces, the decline of cultivated land in 1919 compared with 1917 in producing provinces was 19.3% and in consuming provinces 35 percent.⁶⁶

The peasants' second-favorite defense was the slaughter of animals. From Ryazan a local observer reported: "Horses are being destroyed almost to the last head because of the lack of fodder and because labor conscription has exhausted peasants. They part with a horse in order to get rid of the carting obligation."⁶⁷ Almost identical reports were coming in from other provinces. As soon as peasants heard that a detachment was approaching their village, they began to slaughter cattle. An SR observer pointed to the three main reasons. The first was the general lack of fodder. (Peasants in Tambov Province in 1920, for example, were trying to get rid of their starving horses. Some were giving a horse away for a pound of salt. Corpses of horses could be seen frequently on the roads.) The second reason was the confiscation of cattle, both legally and illegally, by Bolshevik detachments, and the third, peasants' desire to avoid the

⁶⁴ Figes, *Peasant Russia, Civil War*, p. 275.

⁶⁵ Scheibert, *Lenin an der Macht*, p. 175.

⁶⁶ Olberg, *Die Bauernrevolution in Russland*, pp. 61–62.

⁶⁷ "Polosa bedstvii (Iz Riazanskoi gubernii)," *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 5 (April 1921), 30.

carting obligation. As one specialist calculated, in Tambov Province during 1920 alone the total loss of horses was 120,547 (30%), of cattle 46,099 (20%), sheep 165,680 (30%), and pigs 137,397 (50%).⁶⁸

Another old-time defensive technique was bribing local officials. In some places the peasant assembly selected from among themselves *lovkachi*, pushers, whose job it was to get the bosses, *nachaľstvo*, drunk.⁶⁹ Bribes cost the peasants very dearly. Paper money and valuables they had saved in previous years quickly ran out. Peasants also engaged in what the Bolsheviks called wrecking and sabotage. They worked poorly at the state farms, set things on fire, starved cattle, assaulted bosses, and abused equipment. What was more serious from the Bolshevik point of view was that they disassembled rail tracks, cut down trees, and laid the trunks across the track beds. In Vologda Province, for example, peasants set forests on fire and killed agents of the Cheka.⁷⁰ In a word peasants made the city offensive on the countryside as difficult as they could. Attacks on trains, wrecking bridges and tracks, were particularly widespread in Ukraine, because Bolshevik power was perceived so much there as a force that arrived along the railroad.⁷¹

Deserters

In 1919, as we have seen, the main peasant response to the Bolshevik onslaught was passive defense. Hundreds of thousands of Greens, hiding in the forests, avoided the draft and attacked the Bolsheviks only when they felt there was no alternative. In 1920 peasants had to respond to and interact with authority in fundamentally new ways. They began to attack the Bolsheviks consistently and systematically. The deserters' movement entered a new stage.

Provincial commissions for the struggle with desertion tabulated statistical data on desertion monthly for the All-Russian Commission (*Tsentr.Dezertir*). The overall level of desertion and the ratio of deserters to draftees increased considerably throughout 1920. In January the All-Russian Cheka apprehended 36,000 deserters.⁷² In July, however, the total of apprehended deserters during one week only was 111,101, a threefold increase.⁷³ Clearly large numbers of deserters hiding in the forests were not apprehended. Provincial commissions for the struggle with desertion made estimates of how many deserters there were

⁶⁸ "Tambovskie krestiane i vlast'," *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 14–15 (November–December 1921), 31–33, here 31.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ "Informatsionnaia Svodka Sekretnogo Otdela Vechecha tovarishchu Leninu" (1–15 August 1920), Ts.G.A.O.R., Fond 130, SNK, Opis' 3, document 414.

⁷¹ "Krestianstvo Ukrainy," *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 8 (May 1921), 25–27.

⁷² "Informatsionnaia Svodka Sekretnogo Otdela Vechecha tovarishchu Leninu" (7–14 February 1920), Ts.G.A.O.R., Fond 130, SNK, Opis' 3, document 414.

⁷³ Ibid. (1–15 August 1920).

in their province at a given time. The Tambov commission reported, for example, that in July it registered 60,000 deserters, of whom 12,686 showed up voluntarily during a pardon week.⁷⁴ The Novgorod commission reported 7,000 deserters in just one uezd in July.⁷⁵ In October Tambov reported 28,375 deserters still on the loose, and Novgorod's report, as usual, was less specific: "Desertion is widespread."⁷⁶ The Perm commission reported that there were 2,000 to 3,000 deserters in each uezd on average.⁷⁷ The general pattern seems to have been that desertion increased in the spring, reached its highest levels in the summer, and subsided somewhat in late fall.

To counteract these trends, the Bolshevik government sharpened repressive measures in the late spring of 1920. On 12 May the Council of Labor and Defense issued an order to the provincial commissions for the struggle with desertion to announce that if within seven days deserters returned voluntarily, they would be pardoned. However: "Upon completion of this term you must strengthen the punishment in regard to deserters who do not show up and in regard to their families and those who provide them cover and treat them as unrepentant traitors to the toiling people. Chairman of the Council of Labor and Defense: Lenin."⁷⁸ Family members, that is, women and children, were to pay for the actions of husbands and fathers and brothers. This order amounted to treating the village population as hostages responsible for the actions of others. Needless to say, these orders failed to stem the tide of desertion.

Some provincial commissions distinguished between a no-show for the draft (draft dodgers were called deserters) and deserters from Red Army units. The Saratov Commission, for example, reported that 2,859 Red Army soldiers had deserted in October.⁷⁹ Yet virtually all provincial reports draw a link between deserters of both kinds and the Green rebels. Deserters were the fighting core of the Green bands:

Perm: Armed bands of deserters.

Vyatka: Bands of deserters are moving toward Kostroma and Nizhni Novgorod provinces.

Ekaterinburg: Desertion is on the rise. Deserters are hiding in the forests and in their homes. They stage armed assaults, robberies, and killings.⁸⁰

Kursk: An uprising of deserters has taken place.⁸¹

⁷⁴ Ibid. (1-15 July 1920).

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid. (1-10 October 1920).

⁷⁷ "Otchety Permskogo gubkoma," Ts.P.A., Fond 17, TsKa RKP(b), Opis' 12, document 382, p. 1-3.

⁷⁸ "Postanovlenie Soveta Truda i Oborony," Ts.G.A.S.A., Fond 193, Opis' 1, document 66.

⁷⁹ "Informatsionnaia Svodka Sekretного Otdela Vecheka tovarishchu Leninu" (26 October-1 November 1920), Ts.G.A.O.R., Fond 130, SNK, Opis' 3, document 414.

⁸⁰ Ibid. (1-15 August 1920).

⁸¹ Ibid. (1-15 June 1920).

Saratov: In the forests along the banks of the river Elan' there is a concentration of bands of deserters. The local population provides support.⁸²

The Central Commission for the Struggle with Desertion sent out a questionnaire to all provincial commissions in an attempt to systematize the data on desertion and insurgency levels. We have a filled-out questionnaire from Vyatka Province which matches the bits and pieces of evidence available on other provinces. As everywhere else, the overall number of deserters in mid-summer was in the tens of thousands for the entire province. In one uезд only there were 20,000 deserters who formed several Green detachments. The questionnaire asked local commissions to compare the level of desertion with that in 1919. The Vyatka commission had to admit that desertion had increased and that by the end of 1920 the number of deserters had increased even more. The questionnaire asked them to specify what percentage of soldiers in the units stationed in the province had deserted, to which the Vyatka comrades responded that in the spring of 1920, 20 percent deserted and by August the number had gone up to 35 percent. As in other provinces, some deserters lived at home because they made arrangements "with local military authorities, who for a considerable compensation with money and food began to legalize desertion." Other deserters fled to the forests and formed Green bands there. The local commission felt "compelled to send considerable force to fight them," and a separate report detailed weekly and monthly operations of eight detachments devoted to this special purpose.⁸³ The questionnaire suggested that the comrades characterize the attitude of the population toward deserters and toward Soviet power. The laconic answer was: "To deserters—positive. To Soviet power—negative." Other questions required specifying measures undertaken to combat desertion. We learn that 5,185 families were fined for providing assistance to deserters; 3,082 families had their property confiscated for the same offense, and 28,879 families were subject to other forms of punishment.⁸⁴

Even though these data are incomplete, it can be said with certainty that desertion was a broad social movement in 1920 numbering in the hundreds of thousands. It was a form of peasant resistance to Bolshevik rule. And a small core of these deserters played the crucial role in the guerrilla warfare of the Greens.

Avengers

One peculiarity of the peasant war in central Russian provinces was that the rebels did not hold and did not try to hold any territory. It was primarily a hit-

⁸² Ibid. (16–31 July 1920), p. 18.

⁸³ "Doklad ob Otriadakh Osobogo Naznacheniiia," Ts.P.A., Fond 17, TsKa RKP(b), Opis' 12, document 110, p. 160.

⁸⁴ "Otchet o deiatel'nosti Viatskoi gubernskoi komissii po bor'be s dezertirstvom," Ts.P.A., Fond 17, TsKa RKP(b), Opis' 12, document 110, pp. 1–3.

and-run type of warfare. This was a period dominated by small detachments of *mstiteli*, or avengers. In virtually all provinces small bands of peasant partisans, whom the Bolsheviks called bandits, attacked requisition detachments, Cheka agents, and Communist party cells. It was a war not for territory but for power. The Greens constantly reminded the Bolsheviks that they might have to pay for what they were doing. The war aim of the Greens was to deter the opponent from aggressive action and to deliver retribution for what had been done. In central Russia—as opposed to Ukraine, cossack lands, and Siberia—the Greens did not try to overthrow the Bolsheviks but rather to make their robbery of the countryside impossible. Even a cursory look at the weekly Cheka reports to Lenin demonstrates that not just in Tambov but everywhere else in Russia peasant bands harassed the Bolshevik rulers:

Yaroslavl: Banditry is widely spread in the entire province.⁸⁵

Ryazan: Rebellions are going on connected to food supply.⁸⁶

Tula: Gangs of bandits are present.⁸⁷

Voronezh: In 20 *verst* from Borisoglebsk a band of Greens is operating numbering 400.

Vitebsk: The bandits are well organized. In the four uyezdy they number 3,000.

Pskov: OPOCHKA region: a band of 300 is active.

Petrograd: Yamburg Uezd: Green bandits are active. Gdov Uezd: a band of armed deserters is active.⁸⁸

In Ivanovo-Voznesenskaia Province, bordering on Moscow Province, a detachment of fifty Green rebels was operating, led by Stulov and Yushko. "This detachment does not have any political slogans. As a rule they do not rob the peasants, but *opustoshaet* lay waste to cooperative and state warehouses as a means of self-supply."⁸⁹ In other provinces as well rebels attacked food supply detachments, Cheka headquarters, Communist party cells, and state farms. They burned archives and all records they could find and all other attributes of Communist rule. In Tambov Province, as Radkey observed: "the deserters went after the military service records and the peasants got rid of those upon which the levies and contributions were based."⁹⁰

The very word the peasants used, *mstiteli*, suggests that the Green rebels saw their mission in hitting back at their oppressors rather than overthrowing them altogether. Their attacks were sporadic. They would burst out in one province, then die down, then break out in another province. Their political horizon was

⁸⁵ "Informatsionnaia Svodka Sekretnogo Otdela Vechecha tovarishchu Leninu" (1–15 June 1920), Ts.G.A.O.R., Fond 130, SNK, Opis' 3, document 414.

⁸⁶ Ibid. (1–15 July 1920).

⁸⁷ Ibid. (1–15 August 1920).

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ "Ivanovo-Voznesenskaia guberniia," *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 10 (July 1921), 24.

⁹⁰ Radkey, *The Unknown Civil War in Soviet Russia*, p. 102.

limited to their volost' or uezd, and only in rare cases did it stretch to the entire province or several provinces. Small detachments of avengers consisted of part-time peaceful farmers and part-time Green rebels. An eyewitness described a typical scene in a small town in Kursk Province: "The natural consequence of the entire situation is the appearance of local avengers. [Recently] they led across town about a dozen peasants with their hands tied behind their back, and behind them forty-five carts full of their possessions, plows, dishes, etc. These are hostages and confiscated property from the village, where three brothers were hiding who had been avenging [misdeeds of] the authorities. In vain do they send detachments; nothing can be done. The avengers are impossible to capture. They defeat detachments, shoot commissars, and then disappear."⁹¹

In Kursk Province, the Cheka identified one of the leaders of peasant bands as Ataman Shchetkin.⁹² Very little is known about these local peasant leaders, just a few lines in Cheka reports. In Livensky Uezd of Orel Province, for example, all we know about the leader of the peasant gang of "bandits" is the name Mishka, who called himself commander.⁹³ In Simbirsk it was "the well-known bandit Ukhachev, the leader of a gang of deserters."⁹⁴ In Moscow Province it was gang chief (*glavar'*) Emelianov, nicknamed Mountain Eagle.⁹⁵ And in Samara the Greens' leader called himself the "peasant Ataman Medvedey" who chaired the Central Headquarters of the Union to Save Russia.⁹⁶ In Voronezh the Cheka did not know the name of the commander of the "Green army," as it was called, but concluded that his appeals were written by a literate hand.⁹⁷

Spontaneous Rebellions

Peasant rebellions (*bunt*) were somewhat different in character from the warfare of the Greens. The Greens did their fighting as a way of life. They were either part-time or full-time partisans. Peasant rebellions, on the other hand, usually involved an entire peasant community, an entire village or several villages, or an entire volost'. In some cases, as in Kazan/Ufa, Tambov, Saratov/Samara, and Siberia, as we shall see, those rebellions spread to an entire province or even several adjacent provinces. Local rebellions were usually short and bloody explosions of peasant frustration caused by the actions of requisition

⁹¹ "Na mestakh," *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 10 (July 1921), 25.

⁹² "Informatsionnaia Svodka Sekretного Otdela Vecheka tovarishchu Leninu" (1–15 August 1920), Ts.G.A.O.R., Fond 130, SNK, Opis' 3, document 414.

⁹³ *Ibid.* (16–31 July 1920), p. 18.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.* (1–15 August 1920).

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Ibid.* (1–10 October 1920), p. 10.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.* (16–31 July 1920), p. 5.

detachments. A Cheka report from Kursk described what must have been a scene repeated all over Russia thousands of times: "At the approach of the requisition detachment a crowd of peasants gathered, numbering about a thousand people. The detachment retreated into the field accompanied by shouts and shots from the crowd."⁹⁸ In some cases angry peasant crowds pursued detachments, killed the Communists, and even marched to a province capital. A Socialist Revolutionary reported from Novgorod: "The peasants tried to throw off the yoke of authorities by resorting to spontaneous rebellions, by marching toward the city and smashing the soviets along the way. . . . As a result they faced failure and cruel executions."⁹⁹

A small detachment of fifty to a hundred rebels was clearly a minority in a peasant community. This was the core of a fighting force which snowballed into detachments of several thousand at different times in different provinces, following the dynamics of local conditions. The paradox of the situation was that when a core rebel detachment acted on its own in small units, it actually did more harm to the authorities than when it swelled into a huge peasant crowd. In other words the peak times of peasant hatred, when a protest movement crystallized into a mass peasant uprising, were in fact the times when the peasants were most vulnerable. Large masses of peasants attacking local warehouses and Communist party cells were defenseless vis-à-vis punitive expeditions and regular troops. Such upheavals were easy to localize and suppress. Nevertheless the political and psychological effect of these rebellions was perhaps even greater than that of organized partisan warfare. These rebellions involved the entire population. They had the potential of snowballing out of control and leading to a sudden and total collapse of Bolshevik rule.

Spontaneous rebellions were most dangerous for the Bolsheviks when they involved Red Army soldiers or sailors. An unknown rebellion of this type took place in Nizhni Novgorod in October 1920. Trouble started at an army conference in which the soldiers passed a resolution against the Communists demanding better food rations, free soviets, and free trade. The Communists panicked and arrested the presidium of the conference. In response a rebellion broke out. The entire garrison of seven thousand took part. Soviet power ceased to exist in Nizhni Novgorod. The rebels pillaged all the warehouses and killed all the commanders and Communists to the last man. The Cheka report did not elaborate on their political agenda. Yet it is clear that this was an explosion of mobilized peasants' frustration over miserable food rations.¹⁰⁰ This top secret report added that one of the commissars lived in a mansion of twelve rooms

⁹⁸ Ibid. (1–15 July 1920), p. 7.

⁹⁹ "Krestianskie nastroyeniia. Novgorodskaiia guberniia (February 1920) Otchet, doklady mestnykh organizatsii PSR," Ts.P.A., Fond 274, PSR, Opis' 1, document 25, p. 35.

¹⁰⁰ "Doklad o Nizhegorodskikh sobytiakh." To the chairman of the Vecheka, Dzerzhinsky; to the chairman of the Special Department of the Vecheka, Menzhinsky (31 October 1920), Ts.P.A., Dzerzhinsky Archive, Fond 76, Opis' 3, document 22.

luxuriously furnished. The soldiers must have perceived him as a new barin, and they did to the Communists what they had done to the landlords in 1917.

Large-scale Uprisings

Peasant rebellions in central European Russia followed the peasant calendar. The first wave was in spring, and the second and even more powerful in the fall. In April 1920 an American consul cabled to Washington: "It is reported that in eleven central provinces there was in progress on April 12, a general uprising of peasants against the Bolshevik rule, induced by lack of seeds for sowing of new crops and the requisition decrees. Red army soldiers sent to suppress uprisings have in many instances gone over to the counterrevolutionaries."¹⁰¹ Peasants were most effective when they were well organized into relatively small, well-armed detachments with capable and experienced military leaders and when a majority of the local peasants, especially better-off ones, supported them with provisions and manpower. Large numbers of deserters in provinces adjacent to the former front lines of the civil war provided an influx of military expertise into the Green movement. The area between the Volga and the Urals was saturated with deserters from the Red and White armies. The presence of deserters, the involvement of Tatars and other non-Russian peasants, and the influence of the SRs were the elements that distinguished the rebellion in this area from others. The rebels referred to their war against the Bolsheviks as the War of Black Eagle and the Farmer.¹⁰² The main cause of the rebellion in February–March 1920 was the excessive and brutal collection of food tribute.

The uprising was sparked, like so many others, by the arrival of a requisition detachment in a small village. This one, Novaia Elan', Troitskaia Volost', was not far from Menzelinsk. The detachment commander demanded that the peasants deliver the assigned target amount of grain and threatened to arrest the entire gathering if the target was not met. Peasants complained to the volost' Executive Committee. In retaliation the detachment commander declared a state of emergency and seized twenty hostages, including women, from among the peasants. On the next day, 7 February, the peasants demanded that the hostages be released. The commander refused. The peasants attacked the detachments and sent out delegates to neighboring communities asking for help. On 9 February the Cheka chief, the police chief, and other soviet and party functionaries were killed in Novaia Elan' by rebellious peasants. The uprising began to spread. In Zainsk Township the rebels formed their headquarters, chaired by a deserter named Milovanov, and killed off the Communists.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Imbrie to Secretary of State, Vyborg, Finland (21 April 1920), Records, dispatch 861.00.6792.

¹⁰² Figes, *Peasant Russia, Civil War*, p. 333.

¹⁰³ Litvin, *Kazan*, p. 158–59.

Zainsk and Menzelinsk (between Ufa and Simbirsk) became the center of the uprising. Peasant rebels killed twenty-eight members of a workers' food collection brigade from Petrograd and a local Cheka boss who was known for his merciless war against local deserters hiding in the forests. On 13 February the chairman of the Kazan Province soviet wrote in a memo: "The rebellion has been going on for four days [and is] already inspiring others. We ought to show them that we have enough strength and that we are not kidding. Would you please send sufficient armed force for suppression."¹⁰⁴

The uprising spread like fire, and by mid-March sixty volosti were actively supporting the insurgents. Upon arrival in neighboring villages, rebels would gather the local residents and announce a mobilization of the male population. The rebel draft in the liberated area yielded a 26,000-strong army. The rebels were poorly armed. Only some of them had rifles. Yet they showed a remarkable degree of organization. Elected peasant chieftans formed headquarters and quickly set up a system of food supply. The influence of the SRs and deserters manifested itself immediately, since the rebels tried to organize a functioning administration. The total number of rebels reached 40,000.¹⁰⁵ In mid-March parts of Ufa, Kazan, and Simbirsk provinces were under rebel control.

On 2 March N. N. Krestinsky cabled to Trotsky: "The Muslim peasant uprising in Kazan and Ufa provinces is growing."¹⁰⁶ The rebels' political slogans also betrayed a strong SR influence. They echoed the SRs' official doctrine of the third force in the civil war: Down with the Whites and Down with the Reds, Long Live Peasant Power! Tatar, Russian, Bashkir, and Mordovian peasants participated in this movement. They systematically destroyed all attributes of Soviet power and killed 600 Soviet officials. The Bolsheviks sent out punitive detachments which suppressed this rebellion mercilessly, as a Socialist Revolutionary reported: "In just one Menzelinskii Uezd of Ufa Province which became a part of the Tatar Republic they arrested or executed up to 20,000 people, mostly men. Driven into frenzy [*istupleniie*] by the local autocrats-Communists, the Tatars went against machine guns with axes and pitchforks. Hundreds of them were mowed down, and entire villages were devastated."¹⁰⁷ The brutality of the Bolshevik suppression of this uprising was reported by another eyewitness. Boris Skomorovsky, a secretary of the Menshevik Central Committee, wrote to Axelrod: "Just today a comrade has arrived from Ufa. He has described to me (upon my request he will write it down and I shall send a copy to you) how the Bolsheviks pacified the peasants in March this year. They

¹⁰⁴ Cited from *ibid.*, p. 161.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 160.

¹⁰⁶ Secretary to the CC of the RCP, Krestinskii to Trotsky (classified) (2 March 1920), *Trotsky Papers*, vol. 2, document 488, p. 84.

¹⁰⁷ "Bumazhnaia avtonomiia (korrespondentsiia iz Kazanskoi gubernii)," *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 7 (May 1921), 31.

were burning entire villages: a typical picture of punitive expeditions. According to his account, there were several thousand killed among the peasants."¹⁰⁸ According to official Bolshevik data, they seized 3,235 rebels after the suppression. Of those 1,683 were deserters.¹⁰⁹ Thus all sources agree that peasant casualties during the suppression of the uprising were in the thousands.

The name Black Eagles became so famous that in many neighboring provinces peasant rebels used that name. In the Urals near Ekaterinburg deserters from the Red Army led Greens who named themselves Black Eagles. In June the Cheka reported that a peasant uprising broke out in Ekaterinburg Province due to a large concentration of deserters and anti-Soviet agitation by kulaks, Mensheviks, and SRs.¹¹⁰ A resident in Ekaterinburg saw one of their leaflets. They called on Red Army soldiers to desert and join the Green army in the forests. Peasants of Irbitskii Uezd and Krasnoufimskii Uezd joined them in rebellion. As everywhere else they killed local Communists and food supply agents.¹¹¹ This uprising was also suppressed relatively quickly, but the defeat of the Black Eagles did not mean the end of the insurgency. Peasant warfare reverted to the previous pattern of small groups of avengers terrorizing local Communist administrations.

It is clear from this survey of rural conditions in Bolshevik Russia that social and political trends did not portend anything good for the Bolsheviks as the year 1920 progressed. As we have seen, the government was informed well about the atrocities of local functionaries and the disposition of the population. It had plenty of warnings, yet Lenin and the Communist party leadership had no intention whatsoever of retreating from the chosen course of action. In fact their policy in the countryside was to try harder, to increase violence and repression, and to force the peasants to obey. As a result they reaped peasant wrath. It has long been assumed that in Russia proper only Tambov was affected by this peasant war. The evidence presented above suggests that every province in Russia was affected by peasant insurgency. Civil war was raging in every uezd and every volost' of Russia, and that was after the Whites had been crushed. The images of this war mentioned above have remained completely unknown until now: Tatar and Russian peasants with pitchforks being mowed down by machine guns, Novgorod peasants marching on the province capital, Red Army soldiers in mutiny in Nizhni Novgorod exterminating the Communists, and hundreds of small rebellions upon the approach of requisition detach-

¹⁰⁸ Boris Skomorovsky to P. B. Axelrod (6 July 1920), Axelrod Archive. Another source on the suppression of this uprising is V. Miakotin, "Zhutkaia Kniga," *Na chuzhoi storone*, no. 7 (1924), 268.

¹⁰⁹ Litvin, *Kazan*, p. 162.

¹¹⁰ "Informatsionnaia Svodka Sekretного Otdela Vecheka tovarishchu Leninu" (1–15 June 1920), Ts.G.A.O.R., Fond 130, SNK, Opis' 3, document 414.

¹¹¹ "Polozhenie na Urale (pis'mo iz Ekaterinburga)" (29 November 1920), *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 4 (March 1921), 30–32.

ments. This was the reality of day-to-day life in rural Russia in 1920. And yet this devastating war in central Russia pales in comparison with the intensity of peasant war in Ukraine and the cossack lands. Furthermore, the Green tide of 1920 was only an introduction in comparison with what was going to unfold in Tambov, the Volga basin, and Siberia in the winter of 1920 and spring of 1921.

The Peasant War in Ukraine and Cossack Lands

Bolshevik Agrarian Policy in Ukraine

To judge by their agrarian policy, the Bolsheviks did not draw any lessons from their defeat in Ukraine at the hands of insurgent peasants in 1919. Upon the third conquest of Ukraine in January 1920 they began introducing the achievements of "socialist construction" all over again, such as requisitions of "surplus" grain, the Cheka, and food supply armies. The additions of 1920 were labor conscription, horse and cart service obligations, collective farms, and committees of the poor. If one had to devise a policy to provoke the peasants to rebellion, this was the policy. Since Ukraine happened to be in the frontline zone, it had to carry an additional burden of unscheduled requisitions for the needs of the Red Army. As the Thirteenth Army commissar reported: "Agents of the Food Supply Committee and troops passing through confiscate cattle, fodder, and produce, for which they pay nothing. At present the cavalry army is mobilizing horses and giving out receipts for them."¹ Another army report frankly admitted that about 50 percent of requisitioned fodder was rotting. Haste and negligence and a policy of first confiscate, then think how to use it, contributed to the growing irritation of the Ukrainian countryside. As special departments of the army monitoring popular political attitudes in southeastern Ukraine reported: "Political attitudes of the population in the front line are Makhnovite. Protest is noticeable in connection with the possible labor conscription."²

With the arrival of the Bolsheviks and the resumption of "socialist construction," trade in Ukraine suffered a severe setback. As is clear from official Bolshevik data, hardly any manufactured goods seeped down to the countryside. The food supply commissar for Ukraine, M. K. Vladimirov, lamented that even if the authorities had a commodity as basic as salt to send to the villages, they could not be sure that it would reach the peasants. Corruption was

¹ "Svodka nachuprevkoma 13 armii ot 18/II 1920" (Report of the chief of the Revolutionary Committee of the 13th Army), *Doklady i svodki v Revvoensovete 13 armii*, Arkhiv Krasnoi Armii, no. 18, p. 89, cited here from Kubanin, *Makhnovshchina*, p. 125.

² "Svodka osobogo otdela 13 armii" (25–26 August 1920), *Doklady i svodki v Revvoensovete 13 armii*, Arkhiv Krasnoi Armii, no. 18, p. 89, cited here from Kubanin, *Makhnovshchina*, p. 127.

pervasive, and huge quantities of goods disappeared from state distribution networks into the free market.³ Requisitioned cattle died at rail stations because nobody cared to feed them. What was requisitioned could not be transported; what had to be distributed vanished without a trace. Abuse of power by competing civilian and army authorities generated widespread discontent within two months of the Bolshevik arrival.

The target grain collection system was much more difficult to implement in Ukraine than in Russia. The Bolsheviks had no institutional infrastructure. The countryside on the other hand was organized and armed. Three years of partisan warfare had produced autonomous and virtually self-ruling peasant areas. To break the established military and political power in the Ukrainian village was the Bolsheviks' main task in early 1920. As is well known, the Bolshevik solution was to mobilize the masses and promote class struggle. The party mobilized 10,576 fighters to storm the countryside on the food supply front in the summer of 1920. Their mission was to undermine the power of the "class enemy" in the countryside and to extract "surplus" grain. More than 1,000 of them were killed by peasants during the first nine months of 1920.⁴ The effectiveness of these storm troopers was rather low. They managed to extract only 9,721,000 pud of grain from all of Ukraine, compared with a 10 million collection target for an average Russian province. Actual collection as a percentage of the target by province was Volyn' 2.69%; Podol' 4.9%; Aleksandrovskaiia 3.5%, Chernigov 16.6%.⁵ These figures show that despite an all-out effort the Bolsheviks failed to establish control over the Ukrainian countryside in 1920.

Realizing how weak they really were, the Bolsheviks reverted to their old and well-tested method: divide and rule. By a decree of 18 May committees of the poor were revived or introduced in Ukraine, only under a new Ukrainian name. The plan was to divide the Ukrainian countryside by class lines and to seek an alliance with the poor peasants, a policy that had been pursued in Russia in 1918 and failed. According to Rakovskii, the head of the Ukrainian government, the Bolsheviks did not have much of a choice. They had no means to enforce target collection. An additional impetus for this policy was the fact that in 1919 poor peasants were a majority in the anti-Bolshevik bands. According to Rakovskii, rich peasants stayed in the village and paid poor ones to fight. Poor peasants were the hired army of the kulaks. The Bolsheviks decided to hire them as their army against the kulaks. The decree specified that the poor committees would receive from 10 to 25 percent of requisitioned grain.⁶

³ M. K. Vladimirov, "Krupnye i novye usiliia," *Kommunist*, no. 5 (1920), cited here from Kubanin, *Makhnovshchina*, p. 128.

⁴ *Sbornik Otchetov Narodnykh Kommissarov*, cited in Kubanin, *Makhnovshchina*, p. 130.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ On the kulaks' hired army, see Rakovskii, "Doklad na Kharkovskoi gubpartiinoi konferentsii," 15/II (1921), p. 21, cited here from Kubanin, *Makhnovshchina*, p. 136; for data on committees of

In view of the universal hostility to state farms the Bolsheviks scaled down their presence somewhat in 1920. As a people's commissar of land explained: "In the eyes of peasant masses the state farm was a new form of '*panshchina*' [rule by landlords] under which only the owner changed; the old one was replaced by the state."⁷ Instead of state farms they cultivated now collective farms, conceived of as collectives of poor peasants turned rich after expropriating the kulaks. By this policy the Bolsheviks tried to kill two birds with one stone. By transferring kulak property to poor peasants they wanted to destroy the economic base of private enterprise and political opposition and at the same time to create a class of grateful laborers who would be happy to work under party guidance, thus freeing the party from reliance on the market. The best aspect of this policy for the Bolsheviks was that it did not cost them anything. They paid for it with kulak property. Out of the total of 790 volost'-level committees of the poor, 608 confiscated land from "kulaks." The total quantity of confiscated land was 285,000 desiatin. In 1919 there were only 300 collective farms in Ukraine; in 1920 the number grew to 1,428, and by 1922 to 3,778. Just as in Russia in 1918 the policy failed. Peasant leaders, indeed often better-off peasants, took control over the formation of the poor committees themselves.⁸ And if those committees served the Bolsheviks, their members were mercilessly killed. By June–July 1920 the Bolshevik war with the peasants was in full gear in Ukraine. This time it was called "class struggle against the kulaks."

Occupation Policies in the Don Host and Kuban

When in early 1920 the Red Army overran the cossack lands of the Don and Kuban, having driven the defeated White army to Crimea, the new Communist authorities were well aware that they were now in hostile country. Don and Kuban cossacks had been the backbone of the White armies. The tone of the Bolshevik authorities was that of conquerors in an occupied country. The cossacks had to pay the price for their "collaboration" with the Whites. Many cossack villages (*stanitsy*) were forced to pay an indemnity to the victors, some were earmarked for liquidation, and the cossack population was deported to the north.⁹ The cossacks, demoralized by defeats, tired of war, and viewed with hostility by Russian peasants (the so-called outsiders, settlers who had come to

the poor in Ukraine by province, see "Obzor organizatsii komitetov nezamozhnikh selian" (izdanie NKVD Ukrainy, 1921), p. 6, cited here from Kubanin, *Makhnovshchina*, p. 137.

⁷ "Otchet narkomzerna Piatomu s'ezdu," *ibid.*, p. 133.

⁸ "Otchet TsKa KP(b)U" (15 November 1920) prilozhenie no. 5 to *Kommunist*, cited here from Kubanin, *Makhnovshchina*, p. 139.

⁹ "Predkavkaz'e pod Sovetskoi vlast'iu (Iz Terskoi oblasti i Stavropol'skoi gubernii)," *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 7 (May 1921), 25–27, here 25.

cossack lands from central Russia), displayed passivity and resignation. Many stanitsy, although suspicious of the Bolsheviks but resentful of the Whites as well, tried to show loyalty to the new authorities. Some cossacks, however, fled to the mountains of the North Caucasus in anticipation of what they believed to be an inevitable new cossack insurgency against the Bolsheviks.¹⁰ The peasant population on the other hand welcomed the Reds as their liberators, since they had had no representation in the cossack Circle Assembly of the Don or the Kuban Rada (parliament). Excluded from representation, they naturally regarded the Bolsheviks as their protectors. In Kuban and especially on the Black Sea coast, it should be recalled, retreating armies of General Denikin were harassed by peasant detachments of Greens, who saw themselves as allies of the advancing Reds. Local peasants in Stavropol Province even elected their own soviets and proudly declared to the Reds that they had created their own Soviet power before the Reds arrived.¹¹

In the cities workers, Mensheviks and SRs, and even the Kadet intelligentsia, although distrustful of Bolshevik intentions, greeted the Red Army, if not with enthusiasm, then with a cautious welcome. At least the war was over, they reasoned. Perhaps the new authorities would be better than Denikin's counter-intelligence officers. Both the SR and Menshevik local organizations went through agonizing factional infighting as to whether to persist in oppositional politics in regard to the Bolsheviks or to give them the benefit of the doubt and hope that a new start of peaceful labor democracy was at hand. Indeed the Revolutionary War Council of the Ninth Army in Kuban and the Revolutionary Committee of the province announced that no reprisals against cossacks for past "collaboration" with the Whites or for participation in the White armies would follow.¹² It seemed that Moscow was trying to avoid repeating its mistake of 1919, when upon entry into the Don country it started its rule with a massive terror campaign of decossackization which led to a universal cossack rebellion, clearing the way for General Denikin's offensive.

The Bolsheviks faced a favorable sociopolitical situation. Yet it seems that the new masters decided not to appeal to the initial cooperative mood of the local population but to instill fear and obedience. The Bolsheviks treated the area and its people as a source of revenue. They were going to get what Soviet power needed or else force would be applied. In a frank but rather cynical cable to G. K. Ordzhonikidze, a member of the Rev. Com. for North Caucasus, Lenin admonished him on the eve of Soviet occupation of the North Caucasus: "We need oil desperately [*do zarezu*]. Work out a declaration to the population saying that we will slaughter all of them if they set fire to or sabotage the oil and

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² "Prikaz Revvoensoveta 9oi armii i Kubansko-Chernomorskogo Revkoma" (2 July 1920), Ts.G.A.S.A., Fond 192, Politotdel 9oi armii, Opis' 1, document 240.

the oil wells, and conversely that we will grant life to them all if Maikop and particularly Grozny are handed over intact."¹³

The Bolsheviks distrusted all groups of the local population. They disbanded the peasant soviets, just as they had disbanded the Rada and the local cossack assemblies, and replaced all these locally elected bodies with revolutionary committees. Instead of the disbanded Kuban Rada, the Bolsheviks announced elections to the province Congress of Soviets. That in itself was an affront to local pride, which was exacerbated by the fact that not the soviets but the Bolshevik-appointed revolutionary committees were represented at the congress. And on top of that it had no power. The real master of the province was the Kubchernomor [Kuban/Black Sea coast] Rev. Com. Instead of enhancing divisions between peasants (outsiders) and cossacks, the Bolsheviks promoted their solidarity by their policies. The Bolsheviks distrusted not only peasant soviets and cossack assemblies but also those cossacks and peasants who had led the resistance against the Whites. They were not inclined to tolerate any independent force. The leaders of anti-White Green detachments discovered to their astonishment that the Bolsheviks, whom they had considered allies, now wanted to destroy them. In Stavropol and on the Black Sea coast the new authorities arrested leaders of the anti-White movement.¹⁴

The priority of the new masters was to pump out as much food from the conquered country as possible. As an order of the Kuban Cheka threatened: "In order to guarantee peaceful life for the laboring cossacks and peasantry and for the supply of central Russia with grain, Soviet power will not stop before any measures and sacrifices. All acts of White-Green bands will be suppressed with merciless cruelty."¹⁵ The Statistical Department of Kuban calculated that the collection targets for the province were simply impossible to fulfill.¹⁶ In the Don Host the new authorities decided that the cossacks were too rich by the standards of central Russia. Families that had three pairs of bulls were allowed to retain only one; those who had six horses could keep four. In central Russia, they said, peasants had none. That may well have been true, but the result was that cossacks could not and did not want to cultivate as much land as they customarily did. The collection target for the Don Host in the summer of 1920 was set at 36 million pud of grain (compare with 10 million for an average

¹³ Lenin to Smilga and Ordzhonikidze (28 February 1920), *Trotsky Papers*, vol. 2, document 486, p. 80.

¹⁴ This information is from the official statement of N. V. Voronovich, the deputy chairman of the Committee of Liberation of the Black Sea Coast, an organization of peasant rebels who had fought the Whites in 1919: "Krestianskoe dvizhenie na Chernomor'e," *Volia Rossii* (21 December 1920), 3; also see *ibid.*, *Volia Rossii* (22 December 1920), 2.

¹⁵ "Obrashchenie Vecheka k naseleniiu Kabanskoi oblasti i chernomorskogo poberezh'ia" (October 1920), cited here from "Krovozhadnyi manifest," *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 7 (May 1921), 30.

¹⁶ "V sovetskoi Kubani," *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 12–13 (September–October 1921), 43.

province in central Russia). By the summer months the cossack population had already been stripped of most of its possessions, so the main blow now fell upon the peasants, who had welcomed the Bolsheviks a few months earlier. As a local observer reported:

In the course of three–four months undisguised robbery was going on, senseless, wild, and persistent. They took everything, literally cleared out the grainaries. You want facts? Every village, every farm. They took away the seed grain as well. For nondelivery they arrested hostages [*otvetchiki*], completely innocent people, who had given everything they could. They kept them in barns and basements; they kept them there for a week or a month and then tried them for something. And this was happening in almost every village. They imprisoned entire executive committees of soviets if those were from the local people. Arrests were conducted rudely and cynically [*vozmutilno*], and the only cause was that a village could not, was not able to deliver. It simply did not have any more grain.¹⁷

Collection targets in Kuban and Don included not only grain, cattle, and vegetables but also pillows, clothes, shoes, and other types of personal property. Observers called this a systematic robbery of the population. Needless to say, much of the requisitioned property was divided among the local bosses (*nachal'stvo*).¹⁸ As in central Russia, the new authorities set up state farms and imposed all kinds of labor obligations on peasants and cossacks, who for the first time found themselves on the same side of the barricades. Peasants were conscripted to cart all kinds of requisitioned goods for no pay at all. Any protest or refusal to work was qualified as insurgency against Soviet power. This regime of occupation and plunder in just one year led to the pauperization of one of Russia's richest agricultural areas.

Abuse of authority was widespread because it was uncontrollable. Some operations of the new masters were not even disguised as being for the benefit of the "starving workers of Moscow and Petrograd." It was plain robbery, as is clear from a report of the administration subdepartment of the Kuban Province Revolutionary Committee: "After the appearance of [Green] bands in Temnolesskaia Stanitsa the punitive detachment no longer bothered to determine the behavior of the population. Under the guise of a search for weapons the detachment robbed the population, took away horses and stole clothes from the residents by breaking their trunks, etc."¹⁹ In some cases the cruelty of punitive detachments was so blatant and senseless that it moved even some Cheka officials to object to Moscow. One report of a special Cheka plenipotentiary in the region characterized the party and Soviet rulers of Stavropol Province in

¹⁷ "Na Donu," *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 9 (June 1921), 31.

¹⁸ "Na Kubani," *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 5 (April 1921), 29.

¹⁹ "Svodka no. 127 Informatsionno-Instruktorskogo podotdela Kubansko-Chernomorskogo ot-dela upravleniia" (7 October 1920), Ts.G.A.S.A., Fond 192, Politotdel 9oi armii, Opis' 1, document 240.

scathing terms: "a group of highly placed officials have bogged down in the mud of petty concerns. They have neglected their duties in the province, which caused a rise in counterrevolutionary attitudes. That in turn necessitated a punitive expedition, which ruined a peaceful settlement. The Rev. Com. decorated the commander of the expedition with the Order of the Red Banner, but the Cheka found him guilty of senseless violence against the population."²⁰

Not only punitive detachments in the field but also civilian Bolshevik institutions helped themselves to the property of the defenseless population. As a matter of course they requisitioned the best houses in cities and towns. In Vladikavkaz they evicted residents from the entire neighborhood around the Cheka headquarters.²¹ According to a top secret report by the plenipotentiary of the Cheka who inspected the activity of the Cheka in that region: "The Cheka and the special departments in the Caucasus do not understand their tasks in the context of the general situation in Soviet Russia. Persons in positions of authority are engaged in either officially sanctioned or disguised robbery, enriching themselves. . . . Or else they are making their careers and are looking for White Guardist organizations everywhere."²² If this damning information had been reported by a Socialist Revolutionary or Menshevik, it would probably have been dismissed as an invention of Bolshevik foes. Yet we learn from this internal Cheka report to the Central Committee that the chairman of the Stavropol' Cheka, one Generalov, was keeping several hundred arrested peasants in the Cheka cellar while upstairs banquets were held in his honor "with dancing and consumption of alcohol." Generalov appointed his personal buddies to all important posts, including chairman of the Secret Department. Furthermore for the entire summer Generalov lived in Piatigorsk, a town in the mountains, dealing in cocaine. On top of that Generalov turned a number of secret apartments for Cheka business in the city into "entertainment houses."²³ It would be difficult to believe that types like Generalov were devoted to socialism. Cheka bosses like him simply liked power and exploited the opportunity presented by the Bolshevik dictatorship to set themselves up comfortably.

Local dictators were very inventive in creating pretexts for robbing the populace. In early 1921 the Ekaterinodar authorities decided to celebrate the anniversary of the Paris Commune by a new attack on the "bourgeoisie." All city

²⁰ Lander, "Iz doklada o polozhenii del na Severnom Kavkaze," Ts.P.A., Fond 17, TsKa RKP(b), Opis' 84, Biuro Sekretariata TsKa, document 75 (10 October 1920), p. 19.

²¹ "Predkavkaz'e pod Sovetskoi vlast'iu (Iz Terskoi oblasti i Stavropol'skoi gubernii)," *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 7 (May 1921), 25-27, here 26.

²² A. N. Latsis, "Doklad o deiatel'nosti upolnomochennykh Vecheka i Osobykh Otdelov Vecheka na Severnom Kavkaze i o sostoianii Cheka i Osobykh Otdelov na mestakh" (25 December 1920) (Report on the activity of the plenipotentiaries of the Cheka and the special departments of the Cheka), Ts.P.A., Fond 17, TsKa RCP(b), Opis' 84, Biuro Sekretariata TsKa, document 75, pp. 58-59.

²³ Ibid.

residents had to fill out a questionnaire specifying their profession and social origin. At night armed detachments of the Cheka and Red Army burst into the apartments of all those identified as "bourgeoisie": former merchants, officers, lawyers, professors, and engineers. After a search they confiscated, better to say appropriated, clothes, money, and other valuables from the "class enemy" and shoved the unfortunate "socially hostile elements" into carts. Some were incarcerated in a concentration camp, others dispatched to hard labor on the Caspian Sea. Several hundred families were affected by this operation.²⁴ For the local population in the Don Host and Kuban the German presence of 1918 or even the White rule of 1919 were harmless compared with the Bolshevik occupation of 1920. As early as the summer of 1920 the peasant war flared up with new vigor.

Peasant Rebels: Ukraine

Political authority in the Ukrainian countryside in 1920, wrote a manager of a small factory in Kiev Province, was in the hands of partisan detachments. Their power was permanent and the Bolsheviks' transitory. Partisan bands moved unimpeded throughout Kiev, Podol'e, Volyn', and other provinces. Village elders were their men on the spot. They fought the Bolsheviks under yellow and blue Ukrainian flags, posted appeals to the local population condemning foreigners and outsiders, Muscovites and Jews.²⁵ The higher the degree of organization and coordination, the more powerful was the peasant rebel movement. Most Ukrainian bands were led by experienced military leaders, formerly junior officers, mostly from the Ukrainian army of Petliura. They maintained military discipline in their detachments, espoused a coherent ideology of Ukrainian independence, and operated in an area with few Bolshevik institutions and no local Bolsheviks. The population was not as rich as in previous years, but certainly well-off by Russian standards, and provided generous support. It was for these obvious reasons that the *Dobrodii* (Ukrainian partisans) maintained de facto control over the Ukrainian countryside. In a classified communication Trotsky admitted as much: "Petliura's men have a proper, strong, and purely military organization in the rear, stronger than that of Soviet power."²⁶ According to classified data of the Headquarters for the Struggle with Insurgency in Ukraine, twelve partisan detachments were active in Kiev Province alone at the end of 1920 and the early months of 1921.²⁷ At least half of the

²⁴ "V sovetskoi Kubani," *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 12–13 (September–October 1921), 43.

²⁵ Iv. Derevensky, "Bandity (Ocherki perioda grazhdanskoi voiny)," *Byloe*, no. 24 (1924), 252–73, here 252.

²⁶ Trotsky to Skliansky (11 May 1920, Nezhin), *Trotsky Papers*, vol. 2, document 540, p. 176.

²⁷ This is a Bolshevik classified document based on reports of the Special Headquarters for the Struggle against Insurgency in Ukraine for January, February, and March 1921. "Povstancheskoe dvizhenie na Ukraine," *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 11 (August 1921), 23–25.

atamans listed recognized the leadership of Ataman Struk and coordinated their military actions with him. Struk himself was a former officer. Five other atamans were identified as former officers and three as peasants. All detachments consisted of a core of permanent fighters which at least doubled in size for military missions; Struk's detachment of 1,000 men grew to 4,000 for combat missions. Ataman Zelenchuk had 100 mounted fighters and 200 infantry. The strength of other detachments varied from as few as 50 to 300 or 400 permanent fighters. All detachments increased considerably for military missions. The total number of permanent fighters for the entire Kiev Province was 3,850, and the total number in all detachments at full strength was 7,950. This suggests that at any given time about 5,000 peasant rebels and deserters were fighting the Bolsheviks in Kiev Province.²⁸ It would not be an exaggeration to suggest that Soviet power did not exist in the countryside around Kiev. A Cheka report to Lenin admitted as much: "Kiev: The situation in the uезdy is alarming. Kiev Uезд is engulfed by insurgency almost entirely. . . . During one of the recent offensives of the bands on Kiev, local authorities ran away [*razbezhalis'*]." ²⁹

Former Ukrainian officer Yurii Tiutiunnik's band operated in Kiev and Volyn' provinces.³⁰ It had a record of twelve attacks on requisitioning detachments, and five of those detachments were annihilated. A band of Balakhovich in Volyn' had four regiments, according to the Cheka.³¹ In Kherson Province, of several bands 200–300 strong, two were led by deserters from the Red Army. With alarm the report stated: "in the area of the detachments' operation, Soviet administration in the villages does not exist at all." In addition to attacks on requisition and punitive detachments, Ataman Sokol's band carried out twelve assassinations of Soviet functionaries.³² The total strength of rebels in Kherson Province was 3,000.³³ In Kharkov Province one of the leaders of the three peasant bands, 400 strong each, was also somewhat unusual. He was a former commissar of a food collection detachment. Another was a Red Army deserter. The third band operated not only in Kharkov but also in neighboring Voronezh Province.³⁴

Poltava Province, like Kiev, was one of the hotbeds of insurrection through-

²⁸ The figure of 4,000 rebels is cited in "Informatsionnaia Svodka Sekretного Otdela Vecheка tovarishchu Leninu" (26 October–1 November 1920), Ts.G.A.O.R., Fond 130, SNK, Opis' 3, document 414, p. 3.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid. (1–10 October 1920), p. 9.

³¹ Ibid. (16–31 July 1920), p. 18.

³² "Povstancheskoe dvizhenie na Ukraine," *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 11 (August 1921), 24.

³³ "Informatsionnaia Svodka Sekretного Otdela Vecheка tovarishchu Leninu" (26 October–1 November 1920), Ts.G.A.O.R., Fond 130, SNK, Opis' 3, document 414, p. 13.

³⁴ "Povstancheskoe dvizhenie na Ukraine," *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 11 (August 1921), 24; see also "Informatsionnaia Svodka Sekretного Otdela Vecheка tovarishchu Leninu" (26 October–1 November 1920), Ts.G.A.O.R., Fond 130, SNK, Opis' 3, document 414, p. 13.

out 1920–21. Cheka reports mention bands of Petliura, Kokot', and Levchenko fighting there month after month:

1–15 June: The band of Petliuravites are active: 20,000 strong. A state of emergency was declared in the province.

1–15 July: Banditry is highly developed here. They have contact with the local police.

16–31 July: The peasantry patronizes the bands.

1–15 August: The struggle with banditry in Poltava Province has encountered difficulties. The bands have one unified leadership and coordinate their actions in different parts of the province.

26 October–1 November: The bands of Kokot' and Levchenko are 1,000 men strong.³⁵

The 2,500-strong detachment of Red Army deserters and local peasants of Ataman Shuba, a deserter from the Red Army who called himself a Left Socialist Revolutionary, was very popular: "Peasants of almost all uezdy of Poltava Province support them, and that is why the detachment appears unimpeded in all parts of the province."³⁶ It distinguished itself by attacking half a dozen towns, destroying grain collection detachments, tallying 28 cases of rail track wreckage, and routing Red officers' school cadets.

In Podol'e Province there were four bands from 200 to 1,000 men strong led, as everywhere else, by former Ukrainian officers in contact with Struk. They burned warehouses and destroyed rail tracks and fought the Reds. Ataman Podoliaka defeated two Soviet divisions in February 1921. And Ataman Babich crushed three punitive detachments and executed everyone captured, to the last man.³⁷

Almost all detachments in all provinces included a large number of Red Army deserters. How many exactly cannot be ascertained because no precise records were kept. The only references available are from Bolshevik estimates. Trotsky, for example, lamented in May 1920 that Gomel Province, "despite proximity to the front, was swarming with deserters."³⁸ In some cases deserters were the main core of rebel detachments. Zelenchuk's entire cavalry were former Red Army men. Matveenkov's 400 fighters were all Red Army deserters. On the other hand Petrenko's 1,000 were all local peasants.³⁹ Out of Ataman Levchenko's 1,000 partisans half were Red Army deserters. Ataman Mat-

³⁵ "Povstancheskoe dvizhenie na Ukraine," *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 11 (August 1921), 24.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Trotsky to the CC of the CP, Moscow (10 May 1920, Gomel), *Trotsky Papers*, vol. 2, document 539, pp. 175–76.

³⁹ "Informatsionnaia Svodka Sekretnogo Otdela Vecheka tovarishchu Leninu" (1–15 July 1920), Ts.G.A.O.R., Fond 130, SNK, Opis' 3, document 414.

veenکو's band was reported as having "many sympathizers" in the Red Army garrisons of Kremenchug. The presence of so many deserters had two important implications. It suggests that the loyalty of Red Army units was questionable and that the rebel detachments benefited from the presence of men with military experience and training. The deserters' valuable contribution to the rebel cause was intelligence information on the units they had deserted from.

Red Army deserters also played a prominent role in Makhno's army. It had a core of 2,000 men, 600 of them cavalry, armed with eighty machine guns, ten pieces of field artillery, and two armored cars (one named "Death to Communists and Commissars"). During military missions this core expanded to 12,000 men, 2,500 of them cavalry.⁴⁰ It is more appropriate to call this force not a detachment but at least a division, if not an army. The Bolsheviks admitted that the entire population of Ekaterinoslav Province supported Makhno. His units gunned down 450 cadets of Red officers' schools and successfully engaged the cavalry army of Budenyi. On another occasion they took prisoner an entire Red Army division.⁴¹ Reports of the Thirteenth Army headquarters are full of descriptions of countless engagements like this: "According to intelligence data, on the internal front the Makhnovites have spread their forces 4,000 strong along the front to the north of the railway line from Pismennaia station to Ul'ianovka. The armored train 'Soviet Russia' entered the combat at midday, pushing them away from the railroad. Another armored train, 'Red Cossack,' entered the battle. As a result the band suffered heavy casualties. 8 June 1920."⁴² Soviet power in southern Ukraine was weakened so much by Makhno's forces that it became possible for Wrangel to defeat the Reds and occupy southeastern Ukraine, the home base of Makhno. The cycle of 1919 seemed to have repeated itself.

Unlike peasant rebels in Kazan, armed with pitchforks and axes, Ukrainian detachments had a plentiful supply of rifles, machine guns, and even light artillery pieces. Each detachment operated in a rather small area. The report of the Commission to Struggle with Insurgency listed names of villages considered "nests," actively supporting their local rebel detachment. The number of villages varied from a dozen, a base supporting Ataman Mordalevich, to 120 supporting Ataman Struk. The number of fighters in a detachment, compared with the number of villages listed as its "nests," suggests that a typical detachment of 300 or 400 core fighters relied on a dozen or so villages for food supply and temporary infusions of fighters for large operations. From other sources it is

⁴⁰ "Povstancheskoie dvizhenie na Ukraine," *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 11 (August 1921), 25. According to the Cheka report, Makhno had 15,000 fighters in June 1920. See "Informatsionnaia Svodka Sekret'nogo Otdela Vecheka tovarishchu Leninu" (1-15 June 1920), Ts.G.A.O.R., Fond 130, SNK, Opis' 3, document 414.

⁴¹ Kubanin, *Makhnovshchina*, p. 148.

⁴² "Zhurnal voennykh deistvii 13 armii za iun' mesiat's 1920 goda," Arkhiv Krasnoi Armii, Delo no. 6986, p. 3, cited here from Kubanin, *Makhnovshchina*, p. 147.

clear that entire villages and volosti were bound by collective responsibility, a sort of informal vow of loyalty. It was very difficult for the Cheka to penetrate this "secret peasant government."

The attitude of the population to the Dobrodii was a combination of reverence and fear. Young men particularly were most eager to join the bands. As a Cheka report noted: "Masses of young people have deserted and joined the bands."⁴³ For some, noted an observer, this not only signified patriotic defense of Mother Ukraine but also opened up prospects for adventure, valor, and the heroic exploits everyone talked so much about. Partisans were very popular among young women in the village.⁴⁴ For many young men, entering a village on horseback with a saber on the side, under a yellow and blue flag, after smashing the Bolshevik garrison, was the fulfillment of their highest aspirations.

The rebels' most desirable target was a requisitioning detachment. Upon a successful attack they had a source of food supply for themselves and could distribute requisitioned grain to local peasants. Zelenchuk had nine successful attacks on requisitioning detachments in three months. He burned warehouses, trains, and railway stations and destroyed rail tracks. Levchenko blew up a bridge. Victory in an engagement usually ended with the total extermination of the Bolshevik detachment. Voloshchenko defeated and destroyed two mounted punitive detachments, Zelenchuk seized and destroyed an armored train, and Struk "conducted successful engagements with three Soviet divisions and set conscripted peasants free."⁴⁵ Some detachments seized sizable towns and cities for a limited duration. This was usually accompanied by the extermination of Communists and frequently anti-Jewish pogroms. All detachments were reported to have displayed exceptional cruelty to Communists: "If on their path they encounter a small Communist detachment, it would vanish without a trace. There were cases when dozens of Communists were buried alive."⁴⁶ Ataman Sirko executed the entire local Cheka at Borodianka railway station, and Zelenchuk's band buried captured Communists alive. The Reds responded in kind. When the band of Ataman Kushch was defeated in March 1921 in Kherson Province, sixty prisoners of war were executed. The Bolsheviks did not have the excuse of the rebels: that they could not provide for captured Reds. By 1921 the Bolsheviks' undisguised policy was to annihilate "bandits" on the spot.

The Bolshevik high command was seriously alarmed by the effect the Ukrai-

⁴³ "Informatsionnaia Svodka Sekretного Otdela Vecheka tovarishchu Leninu" (26 October–1 November 1920), Ts.G.A.O.R., Fond 130, SNK, Opis' 3, document 414, p. 3.

⁴⁴ Iv. Derevensky, "Bandity (Ocherki perioda grazhdanskoi voiny)," *Byloe*, no. 24 (1924), 252–73, here 259.

⁴⁵ "Povstancheskoe dvizhenie na Ukraine," *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 11 (August 1921), 23–25.

⁴⁶ "Krestianstvo Ukrainy," *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 8 (May 1921), 26.

nian partisan and deserter movement was having on the war against Poland. In the summer of 1920 the situation appeared to be rather ominous. The Bolsheviks effectively did not control the provinces in the war zone. Classified reports on soldiers' political attitudes showed that even those soldiers who remained in the Red Army ranks were unreliable. Commander in Chief M. V. Frunze cabled to Lenin: "In Kharkov itself I do not have a single dependable unit now. The mood of the reserve units, which are almost without clothing and are badly fed, is positively vile. I feel that I and the Front H.Q. are surrounded by hostile turmoil [*stikhiia*]." ⁴⁷ Soldiers did not want to fight peasants; many units did not want to fight anyone, including Whites. One report noted that the most popular song at the front was: "I was born as a deserter, and as a deserter will I die [*Ia rodilsia dezertirom, dezertirom i umru*]." Red Army soldiers identified with the deserters and did not perceive them as having committed an act of treason. Those who remained in the ranks engaged in all kinds of trade in stolen goods or in army uniforms, food rations, and weaponry. This acquired such proportions that the All-Russian Cheka issued an order to all provincial Chekas: "In view of the widespread resale of Red Army property in mass quantities [it is imperative] to strengthen surveillance over buying and selling. Those engaged in buying and selling are to be brought to trial." ⁴⁸

Lack of proletarian revolutionary zeal among Red Army soldiers is not surprising. These were conscripted peasants forced to fight for the Bolsheviks. One would expect that the Bolshevik elite, the commanders and the commissars, at least, would have shown dedication to the cause of their party. Yet a top secret report to Lenin made it clear that the behavior even of Red Army commanders at the front was appalling: "The facts are: undisguised self-seeking. [Commanders and commissars] receive the best food rations and uniforms, double or triple the normal quantity. . . . They appear in front of ragged soldiers in beautiful new boots and snow white jackets. They live with their wives at the front line. They have drinking bouts and wild parties; they steal and spill military secrets with their drinking buddies." ⁴⁹ And some units were fraternizing with the enemy. In March 1920 the Bolshevik CC ordered a mass surveillance of the political attitudes of soldiers: "For the sake of the speediest and most radical liquidation of the counterrevolution, the Central Committee orders first and foremost that it is the duty of all Communists and commissars who work in the army to become permanent informers to the special depart-

⁴⁷ Frunze to Lenin (top secret, 3 October 1920), *Trotsky Papers*, vol. 2, document 627, pp. 324-25.

⁴⁸ "Prikaz Tsent. Kom. Dezertir" (13 December 1919), Ts. G. A. S. A., Fond 193, Opis' 1, document 66.

⁴⁹ Biuro Obrabotki materialov Vecheka, "Obzor polozheniia na Zapadnom fronte" (8 June 1920), *Informatsionnaia svodka Sekretного Otdela Vecheka tovarishchu Leninu*, Ts. G. A. O. R., Fond 130, SNK, Opis' 3, document 414, p. 1.

ments.”⁵⁰ In June the Central Committee decreed more enhanced and stringent measures against deserters. Most curious in this decree is a handwritten postscript by Lenin: “By all means strengthen the measures of reprisals [*rasprav*] against all elements undermining the defensive capability of the Soviet Republic in its struggle against the new alliance of White Guards.”⁵¹ Lenin was fond of the word reprisals, *rasprava*. It came up over and over again in his classified communications. Dzerzhinsky organized an elaborate system of surveillance and repression in the countryside headed by the local chiefs of the rear. Their purpose was to terrorize the population into submission.⁵²

On paper the Bolsheviks had a 3-million-strong army. In reality in midsummer 1920 they could not spare a single division. General Wrangel broke out of Crimea and resumed offensive operations in southern Ukraine. Lenin asked Ordzhonikidze to send some troops from Azerbaijan, now conquered by the Red Army. But Ordzhonikidze responded: “I have to report that the situation at the present moment is such that it is not possible to withdraw from here a single soldier. The Gandzha uprising has been suppressed, but the uprising in the province is still underway. . . . Only the presence of the entire Eleventh Army and an absolute guarantee that units will not be withdrawn from here for the present can reassure us as regards Baku.”⁵³ The Bolshevik forces were spread thin. They desperately tried to decide what their priorities should be: to fight against Wrangel or against Poland or against the Ukrainian peasants or against the Azerbaijani ones. The Red Army could not handle them all at the same time.

Lenin was worried that in the worst-case scenario Latvia might join the war on the side of Poland. Romania and Finland might follow suit. He was thinking of ways to discourage Latvia and Estonia from joining the war, and his conspiratorial mind found a solution. “Military measures are to be taken, i.e., try to punish Latvia and Estonia by military means (for instance penetrate across the frontier right on Balakhovich’s [peasant leader] heels for perhaps a *verst* and hang 100 to a 1,000 of their officials and rich men.”⁵⁴ And to teach Poland a lesson Lenin had a similar plan: “A Beautiful plan. Finish it off together with Dzerzhinsky. Under the guise of the Greens (and we will pin it on them later)

⁵⁰ TsKa RKP(b), “Vsem Gubkomam RKP i politotdelam armii i flota” (2 March 1920), *Polittrabotnik*, no. 4 (May 1920), 13.

⁵¹ “Postanovlenie Politbiuro TsKa” (4 June 1920). The cited passage is marked as a handwritten addition by Lenin, *Trotsky Papers*, vol. 2, document 557, p. 212.

⁵² Chiefs of the rear, in Russian, *Nachalniki tyl*: this was a network of military administration over the civilian population in provinces considered to be close to the front line against Poland or Wrangel. They coordinated the activity of the Cheka and the special Internal Security troops. The text of the decree is in “Terror na Ukraine,” *Volia Rossii* (22 December 1920), 1.

⁵³ Ordzhonikidze to Trotsky (Baku, 2 June 1920), *Trotsky Papers*, vol. 2, document 552, pp. 200–201.

⁵⁴ Notes exchanged between comrade Lenin and comrade Skliansky (not later than 25 August 1920), *Trotsky Papers*, vol. 2, document 596, p. 273.

we shall go forward for ten or twenty *versts* and hang the kulaks, priests, and landlords. Bounty: 100,000 for each man hanged.”⁵⁵ Psychiatrists might say that the leader of the world revolution was obsessed with hanging kulaks and bourgeois officials. Lenin remained a conspirator and a terrorist at heart. Most of his orders demanded the same: merciless *rasprava*. One can almost predict what he was likely to do in a difficult situation: more propaganda and more violence.

Don and Kuban Resistance

As early as the summer of 1920, barely three months after the Bolsheviks' arrival, small spontaneous uprisings broke out in the Don Host and Kuban. According to a Cheka report:

Kuban: Uprisings took place in the following towns: Yeisk, Armavir, and in a number of stanitsy. The uprisings have been suppressed.

Don: The bands are active. Soviet officials have been killed.⁵⁶

Fearing retribution, hundreds of cossacks fled to the mountains seeking to join the Green detachments rumored to be there. The Green detachments in the mountains were loosely connected with one another. They numbered from 300 to 3,000 fighters. The total number of Green rebels in Kuban Province was at least 30,000.⁵⁷ What united them all was a profound hostility to the occupiers (*zavoevateli*). The friction between peasants and cossacks seems to have subsided, now that they all faced a common enemy. Yet their appeals and especially their conduct in the summer of 1920 reveal at least three political groupings. The first, detachments of Stavropol peasants, were a new formation. They were still distrustful of the cossacks and sought contact with the peasant organizations of the Socialist Revolutionaries. In Medvezhenskii Uezd of Stavropol Province peasants came to the local SRs and said: “We have started, now come along with us.”⁵⁸ It is not known what the SRs answered, but reports on SR activity in Kuban suggest that the party organization there was loyal to the Central Committee and opposed armed struggle with the Bolsheviks.⁵⁹

The other two groupings were Kuban cossacks. Both espoused liberation of

⁵⁵ A note from comrade Lenin to comrade Skliansky at a meeting (August 1920), *Trotsky Papers*, vol. 2, document 601, p. 278.

⁵⁶ “Informatsionnaia svodka Sekretного Otdela Vecheke,” Ts.G.A.O.R., Fond 130, SNK, Opis' 3, document 414 (16–31 July and 1–15 August 1920), pp. 7–8.

⁵⁷ Ibid. Another source citing this figure is “Le Mouvement Insurrectionnel,” *Pour la Russie*, no. 92 (18 August 1921), 2.

⁵⁸ “Predkavkaz'e pod Sovetskoi vlast'iu (Iz Terskoi oblasti i Stavropol'skoi gubernii),” *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 7 (May 1921), 25–27.

⁵⁹ “Polozhenie na Kubani,” *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 4 (March 1921), 27–28.

their native land from the Bolsheviks. Some Kuban cossack detachments distrusted the Whites and blamed them for the defeat of 1919. Wrangel was especially unacceptable to them because it was he who in November 1919 humiliated the Kuban Rada and arrested some of its leaders. These people were the heirs of the left wing in the Kuban Rada, inimical to both the Reds and the Whites. Their espoused goal was to drive the Bolsheviks out of Kuban and to create their own state, until the Bolsheviks were overthrown in the rest of Russia. The leaders of the Kuban Rada exiled by the Whites to the West promoted this idea in Europe as early as 1919. "We don't want to march to Moscow," the cossacks in the mountains were quoted as saying, but only to the northern borders of the Don Host. These people reasoned that Kuban had already contributed more than its fair share to the liberation of the whole country from Bolshevism. Now their goals were much more modest. Kuban cossacks would spill their blood only for Kuban.

Some Kuban cossacks, however, were willing to join hands with the Whites once again. This third grouping maintained contact with General Wrangel in Crimea and coordinated military operations with him. The Military Censorship Department of the Ninth Red Army cited, among other things in its monthly report, a letter of a soldier: "Now all White cossacks have become Green ones and are hiding in the mountains."⁶⁰ These were cossack leaders from the center-right factions of the former Rada. These people believed that if there was any realistic chance to dislodge the Bolsheviks from Kuban, it was in an alliance with Wrangel. A special plenipotentiary of the Cheka, K. I. Lander, described the North Caucasus in his report as the "bastion of counterrevolution" in the region: "Here the defeated bands of Khvostikov are hiding. Here the two military headquarters have been formed and a political center (the Committee of Salvation). Here all the bands and all detachments are being formed, supplied with funds and weapons and horses via Georgia."⁶¹ Most likely Lander was referring to the SR-oriented and Wrangel-oriented Green detachments and organizations. "We have here," concluded the report, "a force of 20,000 outside of our control."

Political differences between the Green bands' leaders should not obscure their relative concord. It seemed that the recriminations of the past November were behind them. They all agreed that the Bolshevik regime was much worse than anything they had experienced hitherto. The execution of one Kuban Rada member and the exile of several others by the Whites in November 1919 seemed like minor offenses compared with the systematic devastation of their

⁶⁰ Voенно-Тсезурное отделение Революционной 9ой армии, "Politsvodka 9oi armii za april 1920" (Military Censorship Department of the Revolutionary War Council of the Ninth Army, Political report of the Ninth Army for April 1920), Ts.G.A.S.A., Fond 192, Opis' 1, document 137.

⁶¹ Lander, "Iz doklada o polozhenii del na Severnom Kavkaze" (10 October 1920), handwritten, Ts.P.A., Fond 17, TsKa RKP(b), Opis' 84, Biuro Sekretariata TsKa, document 75, p. 16.

land by the Bolsheviks. An impartial observer from independent Georgia, who sympathized neither with the Whites nor with the Reds, described the political climate under Wrangel in the late summer of 1920:

In order to be able to understand what is happening in Crimea now, it is essential to comprehend the following, self-evident from our viewpoint: The victorious march forward by General Wrangel's comparatively small army is not a result of its strength or of the wisdom of its leaders, but rather a result of the kind of political attitudes that are prevalent now in Crimea and all of Ukraine. These attitudes are doubtless anti-Soviet, and they were expressed best by the words of a peasant at the congress of peasants in Melitopol': "Let the devil himself, let anybody come, only not the Bolsheviks!"⁶²

General Wrangel and the leaders of the Don cossack Circle Assembly and Kuban Rada who had fled to Crimea seem to have drawn appropriate conclusions. For the first time the Whites decided to address social and economic problems in earnest. The leaders of the Don cossack Circle Assembly likewise promised that peasants (outsiders) would receive generous allotments of land and their rights would be equal to those of the cossacks. Wrangel tried to reach a *modus vivendi* with the Poles, putting an emphasis not on their differences involving the borders of Ukraine but on their shared goal of defeating the common enemy in Moscow. Wrangel even went as far as sending out feelers to Nestor Makhno, but his plenipotentiaries were killed.⁶³ Makhno would have nothing to do with the Whites. But some of Makhno's affiliated bands decided otherwise. They joined the growing alliance with Wrangel on the condition that they preserve complete autonomy of their area after victory over the Bolsheviks.⁶⁴ Most importantly Wrangel inaugurated a land reform in Crimea which generated genuine peasant support for the Whites for the first time. All these policies were in fact an attempt to correct the failures of 1919. In many ways they followed the recommendations eloquently expressed by P. M. Agaev in his famous letter to the Kuban Rada back in 1919. It was an attempt to unite all the anti-Bolshevik forces on the basis of mutual concessions and compromise.

Was it too late? White leaders were well informed on developments in the Don and Kuban. As early as April 1920, barely over a month since they had evacuated to Crimea, a detachment of eighteen cossack officers sailed from Crimea to the northern shores of the Azov Sea in the Don Host country. Colonel Nazarov led the expedition. His mission was to collect information on Bolshevik rule, establish contact with cossack and peasant Greens, and prepare

⁶² I. Kochuiushchii, "Pis'ma iz Kryma. (ot nashego korrespondenta)," *Bor'ba*, no. 231 (12 October 1920).

⁶³ Kubanin, *Makhnovshchina*, p. 151.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

for an insurrection which would coincide with the breakthrough of the White forces from the Crimean peninsula back into the Don and Kuban country. Nazarov proceeded to Rostov-on-Don, stayed there two weeks, and established contact with officers and cossacks there. The Cheka claimed to discover Nazarov's conspiracy, but he safely returned to Crimea.⁶⁵

On 17 August, exactly in the same fashion as in April, a 4,500-strong White force landed on the Azov Sea coast, only this time its mission was not reconnaissance but a military operation designed to link with the cossack and Green rebels and drive the Bolsheviks out of the Kuban and Don area.⁶⁶ At first everything went as planned. Green detachments descended from the mountains and attacked the Bolshevik forces at the time of the Whites' amphibious landing. A special plenipotentiary of the Cheka, Lander, sent a telegram to Lenin and Trotsky on 26 August: "The enemy has made an amphibious landing 30 *vershs* from Novorossiisk, numbering 6,000. The Whites have advanced to a point 30 *vershs* from Ekaterinodar." The situation, the telegram continued, was critical, since the Whites and the Greens had joined forces; many Red Army units abandoned their positions and ran away.⁶⁷

Initially the landing appeared to be successful, and the Bolsheviks were set on the run. In panic they prepared to abandon Ekaterinodar. Before their departure, however, they did not forget to execute all prisoners held by the Cheka, a total of 1,600. As a witness described: "From the Kuban Cheka and the Special Department they moved prisoners across the river in groups of one hundred, and there shot them with machine guns. In prisons they did the same in front of the walls, and then published lists of those executed under the title "Retribution," only the lists were somewhat shorter than the true number of those killed."⁶⁸

The Bolshevik defeats in Kuban threatened to cut off all Communist forces to the south on the Black Sea coast from those to the north and west in the Don country. If that were accomplished, large stores of ammunition and foodstuffs could have fallen into the hands of the Whites. The next move would have been an advance on Rostov-on-Don and into the friendly Don cossack country. Wrangel broke out of the Crimean peninsula and occupied most of south-eastern Ukraine. A linkup with the cossacks at Rostov-on-Don would have revived the war fortunes of the Whites. Optimists hoped for a linkup with the Ukrainian detachments further west, as they did in 1919. This bold action of

⁶⁵ "Cossack Risings on the Don and the Kuban'," *Information Bulletin*, no. 5 (4 September 1920), 3–4. See also Melgunov, *Krasnyi terror v Rossii*, p. 71.

⁶⁶ Evan Mawdsley, *The Russian Civil War*, p. 268.

⁶⁷ Lander to Osobyi Otdel Vechea, TsKa RKP(b), Krestinsky, Lenin, Trotsky (26 August 1920), Ts.P.A., Fond 17, TsKa RKP(b), Opis' 84, Biuro Sekretariata TsKa, document 75.

⁶⁸ There are two independent sources on this execution. Cited here from "Polozhenie na Kubani," *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 4 (March 1921), 27–28; see also an eyewitness account by a survivor in Melgunov, *Krasnyi terror v Rossii*, p. 64.

Wrangel and the Kuban Greens caught the Moscow Bolsheviks by surprise. Lenin's reaction upon receiving the cable of 26 August from the Caucasus betrayed a clear sense of panic: "The Orgburo [of the CC] must be requested to draw up . . . emergency measures for combating the danger of an uprising, and to mobilize a sufficient number of troops, Chekists, and party members. . . . If we get an uprising on the Kuban our entire policy (as discussed in the CC) will be ruined."⁶⁹

The Bolsheviks did get an uprising in Kuban, which made it impossible to repulse Wrangel's landing at once.⁷⁰ A few days after the landing General Wrangel made a statement: "The nest of reaction is in Moscow. There the oppressors are who are treating the people like cattle. Only blindness and unscrupulousness could regard us as reactionaries. We are fighting to free people from a yoke the likes of which they have never seen in the darkest period of their history."⁷¹ He spoke of the atrocities of the Cheka and promised free elections and self-determination. It was a serious attempt to change the image of the Whites in the eyes of cossacks, Ukrainians, and especially peasants. For a couple of weeks it looked as though fortune was on the side of the Whites once again. The fact that this attempt failed does not mean that it had no chance whatsoever. On the contrary in August 1920 it must have been possible to reconcile all the divergent social currents in Ukraine and the Don-Kuban lands (with a possible exception of Makhno) simply because they all realized that continued Bolshevik rule would lead to economic devastation and the destruction of any manifestation of local autonomy, let alone self-rule. The Cheka had, in effect, recruited supporters for the White cause once again. Yet the numbers worked against Wrangel. Even in 1919 the Whites and cossacks fought against vastly superior forces. Now in 1920 a combined 35,000-strong White army plus 30,000 Greens faced at least 200,000 on the Red side (133,000 regular Red Army plus 50,000 Internal Security troops [Vokhra]). The miracle did not happen, and the Whites' last attempt to seize the initiative failed. What followed was bitter fighting at the isthmus of Crimea and defeat.

On 11 November, Red commander Frunze offered the Whites reasonable terms of surrender, which guaranteed pardons for all participants in the civil war and a permit to leave for those who wished to do so. Wrangel suppressed this offer. But most interesting is the reaction of Lenin: "I have only just learned of your proposal to Wrangel to surrender; I am extremely surprised at the excessive leniency of the terms . . . if the enemy does not accept them, we must not in my opinion repeat them. It is necessary to make short shrift of them

⁶⁹ Lenin to Dzerzhinsky (not before 28 August 1920)]. This is official dating. It may well be that the document was drafted a day or two earlier. *Trotsky Papers*, vol. 2, document 599, pp. 274–75.

⁷⁰ "Ulagaevsky dessant," *Grazhdanskaia Voina i Voennaia Interventsiia v SSSR*, p. 620.

⁷¹ "We Are Fighting for Liberty: A Statement by General Wrangel," *Information Bulletin*, no. 5 (4 September 1920), 3.

[*raspravitsia*] mercilessly."⁷² It is not clear whether the massacre in Crimea after the conquest was on explicit instructions from Lenin or merely in the spirit of this recommendation. At any rate thousands of people labeled bourgeois and counterrevolutionary were killed. The "crime" of most of them was that they had demonstrated, by being in Crimea, that they preferred the Whites. According to Melgunov's calculations, at least 50,000 people were massacred.⁷³

Subjugation

The Bolshevik war behind the front lines in Ukraine and the Don and Kuban lands entered a new stage after the failure of the White amphibious landing and the final defeat of General Wrangel in November. One could have expected that the fighting would die down in view of the hopelessness of the rebels' position. In fact exactly the opposite occurred. Fighting intensified everywhere in Ukraine and the cossack lands. The Bolsheviks directed the full strength of their military might against the peasant and cossack rebels. In southern Ukraine they broke an agreement they had signed with Makhno which had recognized limited autonomy and self-rule.⁷⁴ In the Leninist tradition agreements were but a cover for military action. Now that Makhno had been used to defeat Wrangel, special Internal Security troops were sent to crush Makhno. The Bolsheviks were determined to stamp out any sign of independence or autonomy in the Ukrainian countryside. Rakovskii, the head of Bolshevik government in Ukraine, published explicit orders:

1. All White Guards are declared to be outside the law. Anyone who renders resistance to Soviet power will be shot on the spot.
2. Closest relatives of insurgents will be taken hostage and placed in concentration camps. . . .
3. Villages which rendered assistance to the insurgents by providing horses, carts, and reinforcements are declared to be under martial law and will be subjected to the following reprisals: (a) confiscation of food supply stocks, (b) monetary indemnity, (c) confiscation of property, (d) bombardment of the village, (e) final annihilation of the village [*unichtozhenie*].

⁷² Lenin to the Military Revolutionary Council of the southern front (top secret) (12 November 1920), *Trotsky Papers*, vol. 2., document 642, p. 356.

⁷³ Melgunov, *Krasnyi terror v Rossii*, p. 105. The figure of 50,000 also appears in the report of the Kharkov committee of the PSR to its Central Committee in an underground journal: Kharkovskii Komitet PSR, *Golos Sotsialista Revoliutsionera* (May 1921), PSR Archive, document 2016. For the repressions against the Greens in Crimea after the defeat of Wrangel, see *Cheka*, p. 121.

⁷⁴ The text of the agreement is in Maximoff, *The Guillotine at Work*, vol. 1, *The Leninist Counterrevolution*, pp. 124–25. See also a collection of documents on the Makhno movement from the Archives of the Institute for Social History in Amsterdam edited by Van Rossum in *International Review of Social History*, vol. 13, part 2 (1968).

4. All chiefs of the rear and all officials of Soviet power in the localities are to draft a list of villages which are the centers of counterrevolution and to apply the measures listed above in regard to these villages.⁷⁵

Since most rebels were identified as local peasants rather than Red Army deserters, the Bolsheviks began to deal with the root of the problem, the peasant population at large. In Podol'e Province the peasants of Mogilevskii and Iampol'skii uezdy showed too much zeal in their support of the rebels and had to suffer the consequences. Three villages—Dzhurak, Berezovka, and Chernovtsy—were burned. Five other villages in Podol'e Province also suffered this fate. In Poltava Province a punitive detachment devastated villages identified as “counterrevolutionary nests.” In one case two hundred men were executed every day for two weeks.⁷⁶

The escalation of war on the battlefield brought its brutality to the villages themselves. Relations between the atamans and the local peasants changed for the worse in the winter of 1920–21. The Bolsheviks declared rebel areas hostage and increasingly practiced mass reprisals on civilian populations. This in turn generated more hatred of the Bolsheviks and of Jews, who were identified in the minds of rebels as Bolshevik collaborators. Indeed, after the unending waves of pogroms in 1919, many among the Jews began to regard the Bolsheviks as their only salvation. The enthusiasm among Jews for the Bolsheviks was particularly strong among the youth. From the atamans' point of view this was pure and simple treason, and the rebel detachments practiced their vengeance. Fortunately, after the pogroms of 1919, large numbers of Jews had abandoned small towns and moved to larger cities, where they felt safer.

An eyewitness recalled that in a small village in Kiev Province very few Jews remained. Local peasants got along with them fine. These were “their” Jews, poor artisans. According to this source, local peasants disapproved of the rebels' cruelty to Jews and on many occasions hid them in their houses. When asked if they had hid any Jews, they would indignantly swear that they would never hide a Jew. And yet when a rebel detachment passed through, local peasants did hide Jews, risking their lives. On one occasion rebels came up to a house where a Jewish family lived and, seeing it was locked, started breaking the lock. Upon entry they searched for whatever items might be useful to them, throwing other things out through a window. Local women were quick to pick these items up and carry them away. Yet the Jewish family that lived in that house was hiding at the time with another local Ukrainian family. Only one old man stayed in the room, swaying and praying. He was stabbed and killed. His only crime was that

⁷⁵ The text of the order is in “La Terror en Russie Contre les Paysans,” *Pour la Russie*, no. 34 (29 December 1920), 1.

⁷⁶ The names of villages are in “Povstancheskoe dvizhenie na Ukraine,” *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 11 (August 1921), 23–25; on daily executions, see Olberg, *Die Bauernrevolution in Russland*, p. 62.

he was an "old Jew," as a rebel leader explained. After this all five of the remaining Jewish families moved to Kiev.⁷⁷

One perceptive contemporary observer pointed out that the Ukrainian peasant insurgency movement reflected the complexities of Ukrainian national and regional identity. He put it this way: "There occurred a profound change in the mass psychology of peasants, a change which could be called 'psychological atavism.' It is as if they have mentally returned to the beginning of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, to the times of 'a wild field' [i.e., open frontier], to the times of Tatar raids [on Ukrainian lands], to the slave markets in Istanbul, as if they had to fight once more for the right to live on the land watered with the blood of their ancestors."⁷⁸ What the author probably meant was that the Ukrainian peasantry experienced insecurity and vulnerability as a result of a chain of invaders constantly replacing each other: Germans, Bolsheviks, Whites, again Bolsheviks, Poles, and again Bolsheviks. This caused autarky and hostility to all foreigners and to cities, seen as outposts of foreigners. Since many urban residents were Russian and Jews, hostility to these groups intensified.

If the Jews were accused of collaboration with the Reds, common Ukrainian peasants soon found themselves in a situation in which both sides accused them of collaboration. The Bolsheviks made it clear that peasants had to pay for the actions of "their" bandits. At first this generated even more resolve to fight the "Muscovites," and new waves of young men joined the atamans' detachments. In the spring of 1921, however, the first signs of division appeared in the Ukrainian countryside. A vivid illustration was a situation witnessed by a Russian outsider in one village. News arrived that rebels had killed thirteen soldiers from a Red punitive detachment not far from a neighboring village. One "Bolshevik" was seen wounded and still alive in the fields. What to do? If the villagers helped the wounded Red, they would have to answer to the rebels. As it was, they ran the risk of Red retribution for the killings in their vicinity. Some peasants broke down and reported on the location of the rebels. This, as usual, led to rebel retribution for "treason."⁷⁹

Reds on their part kept burning rebel villages, "nests of counterrevolutionaries," as they were called. Realizing that they had failed to divide Ukrainian villages along class lines, the Bolsheviks' strategy for conquest seems to have been based on inducing peasants to participate in their own self-destruction. The threat of outright annihilation, by burning the village, was combined with establishing a network of informers and local officials who knew that if rebels returned they would be killed. They, as Bolshevik hostages, had a stake in Bolshevik victory. Thus the Bolsheviks essentially turned hostages into instru-

⁷⁷ Iv. Derevensky, "Bandity," *Byloe*, no. 24 (1924), 252-73, here 256-57.

⁷⁸ "Krestianstvo Ukrainy," *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 8 (May 1921), 25-27.

⁷⁹ Iv. Derevensky, "Bandity," *Byloe*, no. 24 (1924), 257.

ments of local control. Their task was made easier by the response of the atamans. Like Antonov in Tambov, they began to attack not only Cheka headquarters and punitive detachments but everyone connected with the Soviet administration in any way and also their families. Thus the most innocent clerk at a sugar factory would automatically be perceived as a Red collaborator. Since the Communist presence in the countryside was intensified as the months went on, more and more people had to enter into all kinds of relations with the occupation authorities. Rebel attacks on them as traitors and enemies actually played into the Bolsheviks' hands by dividing the community and forcing it to submit at gunpoint.

A Reign of Red Terror in Kuban

In the fall of 1920 the Green movement in the Don and Kuban region entered a new stage, similar to that in western Ukraine. The final defeat of the Whites did not lead to the end of hostilities but intensified them. This was the bloodiest, most cruel, and merciless stage of the civil war. The Cheka reports to Lenin clearly indicate the intensification of guerilla insurgency:

Ekaterinodar: The bandits carry out daring assaults on the stanitsy.

Black Sea coast: The bandits from among the cossacks and former officers number 8,000.

Vladikavkaz: During September the White-Green bands have made numerous assaults, shelled trains, and wrecked bridges along the entire rail line.⁸⁰

In October 1920 a Green detachment of about 200 appeared in the vicinity of Rostov-on-Don. They killed some local Communists, and others ran away, the usual story. Then a Communist detachment of 350 was sent out against them. Most of them joined the Greens, and others disappeared.⁸¹ The peasant war went on.

Emboldened by their victory over Poland and Wrangel, the Reds were determined to root out "counterrevolutionaries" by a massive Red Terror against the entire population in this rebellious country of cossacks. Commissions for the struggle with banditry were set up with virtually unlimited authority. Imposing collective responsibility on the entire community and hostage taking were their favorite means. An appeal, in fact a threat, of the Cheka plenipotentiary for the North Caucasus, Lander, to the population of Kuban and Black Sea coast

⁸⁰ "Informatsionnaia Svodka Sekretogo Otdela Vecheka tovarishchu Leninu" (26 October–1 November 1920), Ts.G.A.O.R., Fond 130, SNK, Opis' 3, document 414, p. 15.

⁸¹ "The Situation in the Caucasus (A Russian Consular Report)," *Information Bulletin*, no. 6 (11 September 1920), 4; see also "Polozhenie na Kubani," *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 4 (March 1921), 27–28, and "V Sovetskoi Kubani," *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 12–13 (September–October 1921), 42–43.

provinces acknowledged that "under the influence of the agitation of Wrangel's agents, arrogant bands of Whites and Greens, spread out across Kuban and the Black Sea coast, have begun in recent times to commit bandit assaults on villages and stanitsy, seizing cattle [and] weapons, and to terrorize Soviet personnel. . . . Recently these attacks have multiplied. We know that some villages and kulak stanitsy provide support to the bandits and supply them with food and people. This must end."⁸² The appeal called on the population to inform Soviet authorities about the location of White-Green bands. The population was urged to take an active part in the struggle against the bands, by arresting their local ringleaders and inciters, by reporting all suspicious persons hiding in villages and all raids of the bands, and by aiding the authorities in their liquidation. To make clear that the appeal was not merely a recommendation, the Cheka chief threatened:

In cases when this demand is not fulfilled or in cases when aid of whatever kind is rendered to the White-Green bands, the most cruel punishment [*rasprava*] awaits the guilty, specifically:

1. Stanitsy and villages hiding Whites and the Greens will be destroyed [*unichtozheny*], the adult population executed, and property confiscated.
2. All persons who have rendered aid to the bands will be shot.
3. The majority of Greens in the mountains have left behind relatives in the villages. All of them have been registered [*vziaty na uchet*], and in case of an offensive of the bands all adult relatives of those fighting against us will be shot and minors will be exiled to central Russia.
4. In cases of mass insurrection of certain villages, stanitsy, and cities we will apply mass terror: for every Soviet official killed, hundreds of residents of these places will pay. Our warning is not an empty threat. Soviet power possesses adequate forces to implement all this.

October 1920 Lander.⁸³

In his report to the Bolshevik Central Committee, Lander summarized the pacification campaign in Kuban as a well-thought-out social policy. Hostile social groups and stanitsy were identified and their residents "extracted": "The Special Department has carried out a campaign of extraction of officers. Two thousand were extracted in this fashion. The Special Department sanctioned the execution of White officers who had been detained in the camps, as well as of serious hostages. . . . The entire Kuban was divided into six sections, and each section into smaller subsections, so that each subsection included from ten to twenty stanitsy. A special troika, chaired by the representative of the Cheka, directed the disarming and cleansing of each subsection."⁸⁴ The task

⁸² "Krovozhadnyi manifest," *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 7 (May 1921), 30.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ Lander, "O Polozhenii Del na Severnom Kavkaze" (10 October 1920), Ts.P.A., Fond 17, TsKa RKP(b), Opis' 84, Biuro Sekretariata TsKa, document 75, p. 38.

of the troikas, continued Lander, was to confiscate all weapons from the cossacks, to extract rich cossacks and officers, and "to execute on the spot those found to have supported the Whites."⁸⁵ The operation, concluded Lander, was carried out quickly and with great success.

It is clear from Lander's report to the Bolshevik Central Committee that these measures were not acts of arbitrariness by local officials. Lander was supervising the implementation of a policy approved by the CC. He skipped in his report details of atrocities committed under his supervision. Fortunately another Cheka agent, A. N. Latsis, who worked under Lander, filed his own report with Moscow on the details of the successful operation. According to Latsis's report, Lander unleashed a campaign of terror on the entire cossack population. The key new institution Lander introduced was the punitive troika, a three-man committee: "On 6 October [1920] in Ekaterinodar comrade Agranov, a representative of Lander, in the presence of the chairman of the Kuban Cheka and the chief of the Special Department, adopted the statute on punitive troikas to the effect that the political bureau and special departments were to send out these troikas right after the military units [of occupation]. These troikas were going to execute active elements on the spot, and their families would be taken as hostages and their property confiscated and dispatched to Ekaterinodar."⁸⁶ Officially the death penalty had been abolished; the Whites were defeated, but the statute of punitive troikas reintroduced mass execution without trial of those considered "active elements," exactly as they had been executed a year earlier during the decossackisation campaign. Nothing was said about investigation or even inquiry on the involvement of particular people in anti-Bolshevik activity. This really did not matter. The purpose was to decimate the cossacks "as a class." Moscow's envoy in Kuban ordered to be shot any leaders of the community whose only crime was "being active."

The statute on punitive troikas was implemented. In his report Latsis calmly describes the executions and the taking of hostages. One paragraph suggests that even he, the Cheka boss, was moved by the suffering of the cossack hostages: "Brought over to Maikop by various troikas, the hostages—women, children, and old men—lived in terrible conditions. In October they were living in mud and frost, some in a barracks at the station and some under the open sky. There they were giving birth and contracting disease, and there they were dying."⁸⁷ This improvised death camp was set up primarily for women and children whose men had been shot earlier. Their only crime was that they were family members of "active elements."

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ A. N. Latsis, "Doklad o deiatel'nosti upolnomochennykh Vecheka i Osobykh Otdelov Vecheka na Severnom Kavkaze i o sostoianii Cheka i Osobykh Otdelov na mestakh" (25 December 1920) (Report on the activity of the plenipotentiaries of the Cheka and the special departments of the Cheka), Ts.P.A., Fond 17, TsKa RKP(b), Opis' 84, Biuro Sekretariata TsKa, document 75, p. 56.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 57.

Women in the camp, continued Latsis, were ready to do anything to obtain their release. Some Red Army soldiers guarding the camp asked permission to marry some of those unfortunate hostages. But first they made inquiries as to whether the prospective "wife" had any property to pay for the "marriage" deal and for a possible release. The chairman of the Maikop Political Bureau asked Lander what to do. Lander waved his hand and said: "All right. Let Russian blood mix with cossack blood." According to Latsis, this was understood as license to trade with the hostage cossack women: "And the bacchanalia of trade with hostages took off. The women agreed to marry anyone in order to have a chance to break out of the camp. There was a case of a young girl, who had already been released, refusing to marry a Red Army soldier. And he pulled her back into the camp."⁸⁸

On another occasion a militiaman came to the Political Bureau and said: "You have to release such and such a woman for me from the camp." Hostage women paid Red Army soldiers for their release with whatever possessions they still had after confiscation of their property, and the soldiers in turn paid camp officials a bribe for the release of their "slaves." If this report on the sexual exploitation, degradation, and slave trade of hostage women in the death camp had appeared in the opposition press, it would have been dismissed as a wild fantasy that could not possibly have taken place. Yet Latsis wrote about all this in a report on the activities of his team and his superior. He did not condemn the atrocities but simply listed them among other policies conducted by the Cheka.

We will never know all the crimes committed by the Bolsheviks in Kuban, simply because many of them were not recorded. What we have are only bits and pieces of the testimony of eyewitnesses and survivors. According to an eyewitness in one village, the Cheka executed several women for failure to report on their husbands who had fled to the mountains.⁸⁹ Cases of hostages being executed in retribution for attacks of the Greens were literally countless. In some cases the Cheka executed every tenth or every twentieth person in a village.⁹⁰ When the chairman of the Piatigorsk Cheka, Zemtsov, was killed in an ambush on a mountain road, many hostages were executed, and the local paper published their names in an article titled "Blood for Blood."⁹¹ In contrast to White officers and rich cossacks, whom the Bolsheviks exterminated as class enemies, the executed hostages in Piatigorsk were chance people who were not guilty of anything at all.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 58.

⁸⁹ "Predkavkaz'e pod Sovetskoi Vlast'iu," *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 7 (May 1921), 26.

⁹⁰ "V Sovetskoi Kubani," *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 12-13 (September-October 1921), 42; and Olberg, *Die Bauernrevolution in Russland*, p. 62.

⁹¹ "Predkavkaz'e pod Sovetskoi Vlast'iu," *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 7 (May 1921), 26. The author of this report to the SR Central Committee added that the newspapers describing these events were enclosed.

Thanks to Lander's report the details of this operation have come to light. According to Lander, the Piatigorsk Cheka decided to stage a Day of Red Terror after their chief, Zemtsov, was assassinated. Lander wrote that he had issued a categorical ban on this action and proposed instead that they "seize valuable hostages and execute them, or rather speed up executions of White spies, chiefs of [White] punitive expeditions, and other persons found guilty of counter-revolutionary activity."⁹² The Piatigorsk Cheka, however, decided to go ahead with the Day of Red Terror anyway. Thus Lander presented the atrocities that followed as having occurred contrary to his orders. His report continued: "The question on Red Terror was decided in Piatigorsk in the affirmative, and it was settled in a simplified fashion. It was decided to execute 300 people in the Mineral Waters region. This number was divided among all the towns and stanitsy. According to this target apportionment [*razverstka*], Kislovodsk had to deliver 30 people, Piatigorsk 50, and so on. Political bureaus and party cells were instructed to draft and confirm the lists."⁹³ If Lander's report accurately describes the procedure of drafting the lists of those to be executed, it would appear that the Cheka was issuing orders to the local party and not the other way around. It also suggests that the local Chekas in Piatigorsk and elsewhere had no reservations about disobeying the orders of their chief. They felt themselves to be complete masters in their region and were confident that they could do whatever they wanted. Lander's report confirms this observation by pointing out that the lists of victims were drawn arbitrarily "on the basis of settling personal accounts." There were cases, he went on, when Red officials were executing sick people. In Kislovodsk, for example, they carried them out on stretchers from the hospital "and finished them off outside." The total number of executions fell short of the set target: 256 people were shot.⁹⁴ It is noteworthy that Lander, describing the executions, used the same word, *razverstka*, as was customary in regard to grain requisitioning. It reveals the same approach to a party task. Be it grain or "enemies" to be unmasked and executed, the target to be reached was to be apportioned among local communities.

The Cheka tried to invent new ways of "unmasking hidden enemies." As several independent accounts testify, the Bolsheviks sometimes staged a mock arrival of Greens or Whites in a suspect area. Local residents would welcome the liberators and thus expose their political inclinations. "For example a cossack stanitsa is unexpectedly besieged by a cavalry detachment led by officers in epaulets. They arrest the Communists who did not have time to flee, anti-Communist authority is proclaimed, and woe to those who did not notice a provocation here and expressed sympathy to the new power. The most ruthless

⁹² Lander, "O Polozhenii Del na Severnom Kavkaze" (10 October 1920), Ts.P.A., Fond 17, TsKa RKP(b), Opis' 84, Biuro Sekretariata TsKa, document 75, p. 33.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

reprisals and immediate executions await them. Such staged 'conspiracies' and their 'unmasking' grow like mushrooms after a rain, supplying new victims to the Cheka."⁹⁵ In this fashion the Cheka "unmasked hidden enemies" and executed them mercilessly. Some stanitsy were burned, their residents dispatched to camps in the north, and the "requisitioned" property divided up among party and Cheka personnel.⁹⁶ An SR reported to his Central Committee: "I myself witnessed how in Novomalo Rossiiskaia Stanitsa they made short shrift of the 'counterrevolution.' They staged an armed insurrection and then 'suppressed' it by arresting 150 of the best people from the local population, and executed 75 of them right here on the spot before sending the rest to the rail station called Tikhoretskaia. This was in the first half of August."⁹⁷ The Cheka thus waged a war not only on rebels and their families and their villages but also on the political sympathies of the local population. More than any other this method demonstrates that the Communists' goal was to wipe out even potential leaders of a community and to train the population to forget how to express its political preferences.

The Green rebels on their part broadened their attacks to include not only Cheka personnel, Red Army units, and requisition detachments but also their families and any officials connected with Soviet power. A Socialist Revolutionary described an incident that took place in early 1921 in the north of the Don Host country.

A mounted detachment [of about thirty] encountered on the road two employees of the cooperative, several Communists, and a priest who was with them. The rebels checked the documents of the traveling party. As a result some Communists were executed, but others managed to escape. The priest pleaded with the detachment [commander] to spare the cooperative employees, because they did not belong to any party. The rebels answered: "We know what we are doing. They help the Communists to organize the system."⁹⁸

The two unfortunates were executed. As in Russia, cases were reported of Soviet food supply agents found on the side of the road near Rostov-on-Don with their stomachs cut open and stuffed with grain.⁹⁹ Murders of Soviet officials reached a particularly high rate in December 1920–January 1921. The rebels were ruthless when attacking state and collective farms. Those who had encountered the rebels reported that they were saying that they were "looting the looters."

The peasant/cossack war continued in the Don-Kuban country well into

⁹⁵ "V Sovetskoi Kubani," *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 12–13 (September–October 1921), 42.

⁹⁶ "Na Kubani," *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 5 (April 1921), 29.

⁹⁷ "Polozhenie na Kubani," *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 4 (March 1921), 28.

⁹⁸ M. Pokrovsky in *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 12–13 (September–October 1921), 42.

⁹⁹ "Na Donu," *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 9 (June 1921), 31.

1922, as in Ukraine. Those who traveled through the cossack lands in 1921 reported that there were vast areas of devastation, burned villages and stanitsy, uncultivated fields in some areas, and depopulation. Rev. Coms and Cheka headquarters replaced cossack circle assemblies. The cossacks' way of life, traditions, and agriculture were wiped out. According to one study, the demographic losses of the cossack population were staggering. In the Makhno area of operation, in southern Ukraine, the number of peasants shot or mutilated in 1920 alone reached 200,000. The same number were deported.¹⁰⁰ Combined losses in the Don-Kuban cossack lands, including the decossackisation of 1919, losses in civil war combat, and the Red retributions of 1920, were 2 million, almost half of the total population.¹⁰¹ The Don Host country and Kuban never recovered from the blows of the Bolshevik conquest. After the second and even more devastating blow of "collectivization" of 1929–1934, the name *cosack lands* no longer applied to the Don and Kuban.

The above data demonstrate that the entire Ukrainian countryside, along with the Don Host and Kuban cossack lands, were in rebellion against the Bolsheviks in the winter of 1920 and spring of 1921. In fact it is more appropriate to regard the partisans there not as a party in a civil war but rather as a national liberation movement against Russian occupation. While the Bolsheviks were busy with the Polish front in the west and the Crimean front against White General Wrangel in the south, Ukrainian partisans in central and western Ukraine held an upper hand over the Communists. Some of them had ambitious plans of taking Kiev and driving the Bolsheviks away, as they had driven the Austrians and Germans in 1918 and the French in 1919. The breadth and magnitude of this movement has been underestimated. The Bolsheviks had no illusions that they were fighting not some "kulaks" or foreign agents or White Guards but the Ukrainian peasantry as such, residing in hundreds of villages listed by name.

Despite the outward similarity among various provinces, the peasant movement in Ukraine remained internally divided. There was very little in common between Nestor Makhno, who still kept talking about self-governing peasant communes, and Ataman Struk, who saw his goal as restoring Ukrainian statehood. It seems that in Kiev, Podol'e, Volyn', and Poltava, the old historic Ukrainian core, most band leaders shared Struk's views. In Kharkov and Ekaterinoslav the spirit of the movement was closer to that of a Russian anarchic uprising against all authority rather than that of a movement bent on replacing a Russian-Bolshevik authority with a Ukrainian one. Similarly, in the Don country and Kuban, old divisions between cossacks and peasants, and between pro-SR and pro-Wrangel Greens, played into the Bolsheviks' hands.

¹⁰⁰ Skirda, *Les Cosaques de la Liberte*, p. 216.

¹⁰¹ Mikhail Bernshtam, "Storony v Grazhdanskoi voine," *Vestnik Russkogo khristianskogo dvizheniia*, no. 128 (1979), 300–301.

Just as in 1919, divisions between western, central, and eastern Ukraine prevented its psychological let alone military unification against its main foe. Greens everywhere displayed a regional identity and allegiance.

The peasant movement, regional and local, still represented a grave danger to the Bolshevik regime if it engulfed many provinces at the same time. This is exactly the situation the Bolsheviks had to face in the winter of 1920–21. In addition to Ukraine and the Don and Kuban lands they had to divert considerable forces to Tambov, Saratov, Samara, Tobol'sk, and of course Kronstadt. The Whites were gone, but the civil war was not over. What the Bolsheviks had tried in Ukraine and the cossack lands they would repeat in Tambov, Saratov, and Tobol'sk. In fact the worst in death tolls and devastation was yet to come.

Sovietization of the Countryside: Tambov, Saratov, Tobol'sk

AS THE YEAR 1920 was drawing to a close, the Bolsheviks celebrated victory once again. All the enemies of Soviet power seemed to have been defeated: Poland, General Wrangel, Makhno, and the cossacks. Plans were being made for the conquest of Georgia. The war seemed one more time to be over. And yet the peasant war continued in 1921. Moreover it entered its bloodiest stage. Peasant rebellions erupted in the heartland of agricultural Russia, Tambov and Voronezh and the provinces of the lower and middle Volga, Saratov, Simbirsk, Samara; an enormous peasant insurrection broke out in western Siberia; and on top of it all came the sailors' revolt in Kronstadt.

Tambov

The rebellion of the Tambov peasants of 1920–21 is one of the better-known and tragic chapters of the Russian civil war. And yet it remains at odds with the mainstream Western view. For those who are preoccupied with explaining the visionary Bolshevik construction of the future, the Tambov rebellion appears as a reactionary phenomenon: backward peasants resisting the march of Bolshevik modernization. These views echo Soviet official historiography, which presents the Tambov rebellion as the work of counterrevolutionaries, kulaks, bandits, and other subversive elements inimical to socialist construction. For high-ranking Soviet officials on the spot like V. A. Antonov-Ovseenko, M. N. Tukhachevsky, and others it was clear that the rebellion was rooted in the misdeeds of local Communist functionaries who ostensibly distorted the party line and generated resistance, not just of ephemeral kulaks, but of the broad strata of the peasantry. For the SRs, who had strong local organizations in Tambov dating from the turn of the century and who had won elections to the Constituent Assembly in that province, the participation of the broad strata of the peasantry was self-evident. For the SRs the causes lay not only in the misdeeds but in the very nature of the Bolshevik exploitation of the countryside. They tended to view the peasant war as a movement inspired by SR ideology which got out of control and failed. They saw the main weakness of the movement in the absence of a positive program.

But why should peasants have a program? Why is a program of keeping

things the way they were without the Communists any less of a program than "constructing socialism" in the countryside? Why is a program of destroying state farms, sowing committees, volost' Communist cells, and all other attributes of the outsiders' dictatorship any less legitimate a program than "restoring Soviet power" in the countryside? The mainstream concentration on programs and Bolshevik suppression makes the peasant war seem an episode without lasting consequences. *It is possible, however, to approach the matter from a somewhat different perspective, to focus not on the question of who won and who lost and under the banners of what ideology but rather on the question of the internal spirit of that movement, its driving force, and most important the kind of legacy it left for the Bolsheviks and the peasants.*

The Causes

Statistical data on peasant landholding, social stratification, Bolshevik grain collection targets, the number of collective farms, or any other indicators of economic and social order in Tambov Province suggest that it was like any other surrounding province. As a result of the 1917 revolution Tambov peasants became more homogeneous. There were fewer poor peasants and fewer rich peasants. The peasant commune gained power, as everywhere else. Noble land was divided up, but 72,000 desiatin out of 600,000 were given to state farms, numbering 150. Most of those cost more to run than they produced. The grain collection target for the 1919–20 season was set at 27 million pud, which was much higher than the 10 or 12 million pud average for central Russia.¹ The authorities managed to collect only half of the target amount; still it was a very heavy burden. As in other Russian provinces, collection targets in Tambov were set deliberately higher than the peasants' capacity to deliver. The Kirsanov Uezd Communist party committee admitted at its session on 5 August that the delivery targets were set too high.²

It is hard to estimate how heavy a burden the collection targets were for an average peasant family. The size of peasant plots, the quality of the earth, and the enforcement of targets varied a great deal across the countryside. As Antonov-Ovseenko reported, even when the collection target was lowered by half in 1920–21, it was still impossible to fulfill, because if peasants had delivered 100 percent they would have had one pud of grain and 1.6 pud of potatoes left per person per year, whereas the survival minimum was 17 pud. An SR observer in Tambov Province calculated that a typical peasant family of five had slightly over 4 desiatin under cultivation. The yield in 1920 was about

¹ "Tambovskaia guberniia" (handwritten), in "Otchety, doklady mestnykh organizatsii SR," Ts.P.A., Fond 274, Opis' 1, PSR, document 25, p. 56.

² "Protokoly zasedanii Kirsanovskogo Uezdnogo komiteta RKP(b)" (January–December 1920), Ts.P.A., Fond 17, Opis' 12, document 566.

20 pud per desiatin, so the typical peasant's crop was about 85–87 pud of grain. From those he needed 20 pud for winter (*ozimyi*) sowing, and 37 pud he delivered to the state as his distribution target. That left about 30 pud for a family of five. Since this was not enough to last until the next crop, the peasants consumed some seed. When asked whether they were worried that next year's crop would suffer, they answered: "Whatever you sow, all the same they'd take it away."³

Dispatching collection detachments to the villages in Tambov, the province food supply commissar, Gol'din, urged his collectors "not to show mercy to anyone, not even to your own mother."⁴ Entire volosti which failed to deliver the assigned target quantity were subjected to severe punishment. The detachments took away all grain, "as if swept with a broom," as the peasants described it. They also arrested the chairmen of village soviets as hostages and kept them until the required grain was delivered. In some cases hostages were executed.⁵ Summarizing contemporary reports, Oliver Radkey noted: "Plundering for private gain accompanied the food levy and rendered it still heavier."⁶ In the neighboring lower Volga provinces local Bolsheviks regarded their assigned area for grain collection as their fiefdom, where they deployed their "feudal armies."⁷ From time immemorial in Russia agents of the state had used their power to enrich themselves. An SR observer reported from Tambov Province that members of the volost' Communist cell used the opportunity of state-imposed requisitions for personal benefit: "In Talitskaia Volost' the Communists became so arrogant that, practicing all kinds of robbery, they took away from peasants warm clothes and immediately, in the presence of the owners, put these clothes on, and sent cattle, fowl, and bread to their homes. . . . I witnessed such a situation in the village Eremenki. All these requisitions were over and above the state levy."⁸ In Podvalskaia Volost', the author continued, the local Communists requisitioned the priest's house for the wedding of the chairman. They also confiscated cattle and forced the peasants to deliver (*samogon*) homemade vodka. Drunkenness among the local Communists was pervasive. As in so many other provinces, food supply agents in Tambov showed

³ The data above cited are from "Vosstanie Tambovskikh krestian (korrespondentsiia iz Rossii)," *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 6 (April 1921), 23. The author of this article was not identified; however, Iu. N. Podbel'skii, in a protest letter to the Moscow soviet against allegations of the Cheka, identified himself as the author of the article, which was finished in March 1921. See "Zaiavlenie predsedateliu Moskovskogo soveta," PSR Archive, document 2032, published in Jansen, ed., *Partiia Sotsialistov Revoliutsionerov posle Oktiabr'skogo perevorota*, pp. 551–55.

⁴ Oliver Radkey undoubtedly refers to the same man, although his source spells the name as Golvin and describes more atrocities. *The Unknown Civil War in Russia*, p. 89.

⁵ *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 3 (March 1921), 23.

⁶ Radkey, *The Unknown Civil War in Russia*, p. 31.

⁷ Figs, *Peasant Russia, Civil War*, p. 264.

⁸ "Kommunisty na rabote (Pis'mo krestianina iz Tambovskoi gubernii)," *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 5 (April 1921), 25–28, here 25.

their zeal in cruel collection practices but then neglected storage and transportation of the confiscated booty. "Large numbers of cattle perished, grain burned, and potatoes froze," admitted Antonov-Ovseenko.⁹ As a result: "The majority of the peasantry have become accustomed to regarding the Soviet regime as something extraneous in relation to them, something that only issues commands, that gives orders most zealously but quite improvidently."¹⁰

This Bolshevik characterization of peasant attitudes only confirms the general impression that Russian peasants regarded the Bolshevik regime as a reimposition of serfdom. It was only a question of when and how the resistance would unfold, not whether. In a report to Lenin after the suppression of the movement, the military commander Tukhachevsky noted the peasants' universal dislike of the collection target system and pointed to the "exceptionally cruel implementation of collection targets by food requisitioning organs on the spot" as a cause of the September 1920 uprising.¹¹ Tukhachevsky made a mistake, dating the beginning of the peasant war in Tambov in September 1920. In fact, as we have seen, the peasant war started in 1919, but by September 1920 it had entered a new stage, that of a broadly based popular insurrection. Tambov peasants themselves, according to Tukhachevsky, called it a revolution.¹²

Popular Insurrection

In September 1920, when the peasants' fears for the fate of their crops were at their highest and the Bolsheviks' grain collection machinery was gearing into action, conditions emerged for an intensification of the peasant war. Usually an uprising started over a small incident and quickly got out of control. After the September–October insurrections in Ryazan Province the movement reverted to desperate attacks by small detachments, sometimes feuding with one another. Green detachments were reported to be engaged primarily in hit-and-run operations. A local observer called them gangs of desperate people who took revenge on the Bolsheviks for the brutal suppression of a series of insurrections.¹³

Spontaneous outbursts of peasant wrath, colorful and dramatic as they were, were necessarily short in duration, entailed enormous casualties, and were crushed relatively quickly, unless some degree of coordination and organization was introduced. As numerous observers pointed out, during the summer of 1920 A. S. Antonov's detachment in Tambov Province was like many others, a

⁹ Antonov-Ovseenko, "O Banditskom dvizhenii v Tambovskoi gubernii" (20 July 1921), *Trotsky Papers*, vol. 2, document 707, pp. 484–562, here p. 494.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 495.

¹¹ Tukhachevskii to Lenin (16 July 1921), *Trotsky Papers*, vol. 2, document 706, pp. 480–82.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ "Polosa bedstvii (Iz Ryazanskoi gubernii)," *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 5 (April 1921), 30.

band of fifty to a hundred rebels. They were typical avengers, peasant heroes, hit-and-run partisans. As early as the summer months of 1919 his band had killed close to a hundred local Bolshevik officials.¹⁴ This does not mean, however, that the number of peasant rebels in the summer of 1920 was limited to several hundred men. In addition to Antonov's band there were many others. In August 1920 the Kirsanov Uezd Communists reported to their CC: "During the month of July we have pumped out 9,000 deserters in the uezd. One can estimate that there still are 5,000 deserters at large."¹⁵ These figures match Cheka data for the entire province. In February 1920 the Cheka reported 60,000 deserters, the same number in July, and 28,375 deserters in August after a week of pardon.¹⁶ In neighboring Voronezh there were 50,000 deserters in September.¹⁷ It is also clear from these reports that the deserters were not merely hiding from the draft: "Across the province strong organizational work of bandits is going on. There is a great concentration of deserters."¹⁸ The Kirsanov Communists complained that the bands were systematically killing Communists and undermining the collection of grain.¹⁹ And the local Communists in the neighboring Bryansk region also reported an increase in the activity of bands of deserters.²⁰

Peasant war in Tambov should not be seen as an exception in an otherwise calm peasant sea but rather as the most spectacular and successful movement in a sea of peasant anti-Bolshevik discontent. The peasant movement there went beyond bands of avengers, which were typical for central Russian provinces, and developed into well-coordinated partisan warfare, as in Ukraine and Kuban. By September 1920 the political scene in Tambov included two ingredients crucial for this transformation: a capable peasant leader and a network of existing peasant organizations led by the SRs.

In mid-August 1920 two Socialist Revolutionaries, members of the underground Tambov party committee, arrived in the village of Khitrovo in Tambov Uezd for an urgent meeting of a local chapter of the Union of Toiling Peasantry, an SR peasant organization. The union had to resolve a difficult question: how to react to the alarming news that peasants in the village of Kamenka had

¹⁴ The original source for this cited by many historians is *Biulleten' Tambovskogo Gubernskogo Komiteta RKP*, no. 4-5 (18 January 1920), cited by Iu. N. Podbel'skii in his "Vosstanie Tambovskikh krestian (korrespondentsiia iz Rossii)," *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 6 (April 1921), 25.

¹⁵ "Protokoly zasedanii Kirsanovskogo Uezdnogo komiteta RKP(b)," Ts.P.A., Fond 17, Opis' 12, document 566.

¹⁶ "Informatsionanaia Svodka Sekretnogo Otdela Vecheka tovarishchu Leninu" (1-7 February 1920 and 1-10 October 1920), Ts.G.A.O.R., Fond 130, SNK, Opis' 3, document 414.

¹⁷ Ibid. (1-10 October 1920).

¹⁸ Ibid. (1-15 June 1920).

¹⁹ The session of 3 October, "Protokoly zasedanii Kirsanovskogo Uezdnogo komiteta RKP(b)," Ts.P.A., Fond 17, Opis' 12, document 566.

²⁰ "Doklad Bryanskogo Gubkoma" (July 1920-January 1921), *Perepiska TsKa RKP(b) s Bryanskim Gubkomom*, Ts.P.A., Fond 17, Opis' 12, document 37, p. 190.

killed seven men from the grain collection detachment which had come for an additional obligatory levy. Local peasants, members of the union, wanted to join the Kamenka peasants, but under the influence of the Tambov SRs the Khitrovo chapter decided to abstain "from armed struggle against the Bolsheviks in view of its hopelessness under conditions lacking the necessary degree of peasant organization in other uyezdy of the province, let alone in the rest of Russia."²¹ The urgings of the Tambov SRs to abstain from helping out the Kamenka rebels may well have been motivated by the fear that if armed insurrection flared up, the SRs' leadership of an organized and planned struggle against Bolshevism could be lost to the Green bands. This is exactly what happened. Once the uprising started, however, the Tambov SRs accepted their new role of aiding the movement rather than claiming to lead it.

Later that night, after the Khitrovo peasant union meeting was over, a punitive detachment arrived in the village and arrested three peasants, union members. Now that it was their own and not Kamenka villagers, Khitrovo peasants pursued the detachment, ambushed it, freed their men, and killed those who "turned out to be Communists." Now the Kamenka and Khitrovo peasants were in the same situation. Bolshevik action had united them. The Kamenka and Khitrovo incidents ignited a spontaneous mass insurrection in the entire uezd. Village after village overthrew their soviets, and Verkhodenskii Volost' soviet members were killed to the last man. Some local soviets actually joined the rebellion.²² The peasants decided to march on Tambov. Contemporaries described this colorful march of peasants with their axes and pitchforks, women and children—a procession both threatening and defenseless, constantly growing like a snowball as more peasants joined upon hearing church bells proclaiming the marchers' approach.²³

The psychological effect of this march on the Red Army soldiers' morale was devastating, and many peasant lads deserted to join the rebels. Yet loyal Bolshevik troops, most often cadets of the Red officers' schools and Cheka troops, were not intimidated. For them large crowds of peasants were an easy target. Ten kilometers from Tambov the procession was dispersed. Dozens were killed by machine gun fire. New punitive expeditions were sent out. Khitrovo and five other villages were burned, and collective responsibility was imposed on other villages. If any hostile action took place, the entire village would be burned. Up to this point, therefore, the insurgency in Tambov had followed the same course as in Kazan, Ryazan, Smolensk, or any other province in central Russia. But then, as one contemporary observer pointed out, the appearance of A. S. Antonov at this crucial juncture heralded the beginning of a new stage in the

²¹ Podbel'skii, "Vosstanie Tambovskikh krestian (korrespondentsiia iz Rossii)," *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 6 (April 1921), 24.

²² Ibid.

²³ Seth Singleton, "The Tambov Revolt (1920–1921)," *Slavic Review*, no. 3 (1966), 498–512, here 503.

insurgency and a new role for Antonov. From the leader of a peasant band of avengers he turned into the leader of an invisible and invincible army.²⁴

The commissar appointed to suppress the rebellion, Antonov-Ovseenko, in his report to Lenin claimed that the local SRs had led the assault on the Bolshevik detachment in Kamenka.²⁵ He was mistaken. The SRs had cautioned peasants against violence, but circumstances forced them to side with this peasant initiative from below. On the other hand Antonov-Ovseenko wrote: "After the crushing of the Tambov Province SR party committee by the Cheka, the movement in general ceased to be under the organizational influence of the Central Committee of this party."²⁶

The Role of the SRs

The degree of involvement of the SRs in the Tambov movement became a subject of considerable controversy. At the SR trial in 1922 the Bolsheviks charged the SRs with direct involvement.²⁷ The SRs on the other hand consistently denied their participation. Oliver Radkey, in his study of the Tambov Green movement, shows that the SR Central Committee indeed resisted involvement and in its official policy pronouncements distanced itself from the Tambov insurrection. However, Chernov sympathized with the uprising, and some contacts between the Central Committee and the rebels were maintained. This is confirmed in a Cheka report to Lenin of 25 August: "The Tambov [SR] committee consists of twenty-eight people. It has permanent quarters in Tambov, and its is subsidized by Antonov."²⁸ Whatever the thinking of the Central Committee was, Radkey has established beyond any doubt that the local SRs, that is, the Tambov SR Committee and especially the peasant union, led and organized by the SRs, not only participated in the insurrection but actually ran the war effort for Antonov's Greens.²⁹

The obvious question therefore is, Did the Tambov SRs act in accord with the wishes of the Central Committee or in violation of party policy? Radkey believes that the SR Central Committee did not object to the idea of armed struggle with the Bolsheviks in principle. Yet in practice it put much more emphasis on organizing the peasants rather than on directing the actual strug-

²⁴ Iu. N. Podbel'skii, "Vosstanie Tambovskikh krestian," *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 6 (April 1921), 25.

²⁵ Antonov-Ovseenko, "O Banditskom dvizhenii," *Trotsky Papers*, vol. 2, p. 496.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 498.

²⁷ Jansen, *A Show Trial under Lenin*.

²⁸ "Informatsionanaia Svodka Sekret'nogo Otdela Vecheka tovarishchu Leninu," *Svodka*, no. 81 (25 August 1920), Ts.G.A.O.R., Fond 130, SNK, Opis' 3, document 414(2).

²⁹ Radkey analyzes the relationship among the SRs in *The Unknown Civil War in Russia*, pp. 76–77, 114–15, and 122–26.

gle. The situation was never ripe for a decisive struggle somehow. Radkey implies that the SR Central Committee's repudiation of involvement was a sign of weakness and that the SR party leaders could not bring themselves to side openly with the rebel peasants. The image of the SR party leaders that emerges from this study is one of spineless intellectuals who talked of revolution but, when it came, ducked into the bushes and left the peasants to their fate.

The extent of responsibility of the SR Central Committee, according to Radkey, was limited to creating peasant unions, which turned out to be excellent institutions for sustaining the uprising. Rank-and-file SRs always wanted to do more than get ready. A majority in the province joined the insurrection. The Tambov SR party committee did not encourage the rising, yet it did not abandon the peasants once it started, whereas the CC did, according to Radkey. At the root of Antonov's break with the SR party earlier in the year was the Tambov SR committee requirement that he comply with the policy of abstention from armed struggle.³⁰ Antonov simply ignored "party discipline" and preferred to act on his own, although he considered himself a Socialist Revolutionary. A recalcitrant Central Committee, a cautious local committee, and men of action among the rank and file—this is the profile of the SR party, according to Radkey.

In September 1920 the all-Russian SR party conference had to face yet another in a series of difficult choices: to support peasant rebellions or not to support them. Details of factional struggles are rather sketchy, but the overall pattern of SR responses seems to be that in the areas where peasants had already risen in revolt the local SRs were eager to support them and lead them. The delegation of Tambov SRs at the conference was adamant in this regard, as were the delegations from Voronezh and Kuban, where, as we have seen, some Green peasant detachments were fighting under the SR colors.³¹ On the other hand the SR urban organizations wanted to preserve any possibilities they still had for legal existence and work in the soviets and trade unions. Openly taking up the banner of insurrection would have led to arrests and repressions. The leadership as usual had to steer a middle course, by not ruling out armed struggle against the Bolsheviks but at the same time not embracing it as the party line. The Central Committee explained to local organizations:

In the resolution on the current political situation the conference foresaw the inevitability of resuming armed struggle against Bolshevism. The Central Committee also believes that possibilities of a peaceful transformation of Bolshevism are utopian and that the growing anger among the toiling masses against the pseudo-Communist oligarchy as well as the internal weakness of Soviet power are creating conditions for its fall. In view of this the party of Socialist Revolutionaries, as a defender of the social

³⁰ Ibid., p. 118.

³¹ Ibid. p. 120; and Antonov-Ovseenko, "O Banditskom dvizhenii," *Trotsky Papers*, vol. 2, p. 496.

and political achievements of the revolution, will have to resume the path of direct struggle for their preservation. . . . The PSR conceives of the possibility of such armed struggle against "Soviet power" in the future.³²

Radkey dismisses this as a compromise which fell short of defining a clear policy. He sees the careful formulation of an implied return to armed struggle as an inability to take on the task without ambiguities. Such a view does not appreciate the delicate political situation the SRs found themselves in. In August 1920 almost the entire SR Central Committee was in prison. The Tambov SR committee had been arrested as well. As of November 1920 hundreds of local SRs had been seized and kept as hostages by the Cheka without any charges. The Bolsheviks reiterated that any insurrections against Soviet power would lead to a merciless extermination of the hostages. It was common knowledge that Bolshevik threats had to be taken seriously. To endorse armed insurrection openly was tantamount to suicide. The SR politicians found a much more subtle approach. Appeals to party members put an emphasis on organizing the masses. That in itself was not a criminal act. After all that is what parties usually do. Establishing peasant unions was the priority. For what purpose? The answer was clear: to defend peasants against Bolshevik dictatorship, with arms if necessary in the future. The reference to the future was not an indication of the SRs' halfheartedness but of cautiousness. In theory they could not be prosecuted for plans for the future.

The resolution cited above was a published document, that is, available to the Bolsheviks. The unpublished materials of the SR party conference were more explicit: "The constantly growing insurrectionary movement of the popular masses against Bolshevik power reveals that people's hatred is universal and powerful. It has reached such an extent that it can no longer be crushed and must end with a universal insurrection and overthrow of the Bolshevik dictatorship."³³ This formulation was considered by the Central Committee as a text for its policy statement to local organizations but was in the end rejected as too provocative. The SRs' caution in published resolutions was somewhat useless, however, since the Cheka obtained the original texts of the conference resolutions, which were worded much more strongly: "Taking into consideration that a broad, popular, insurrectionary mass movement exists and its goal is to overthrow the Communist dictatorship and establish the power of the people, the conference of the PSR foresees the inevitability of resuming armed struggle against Soviet power in the future."³⁴ In October 1920 General Wrangel was far

³² *Partiinaia Zhizn'*. Dokumenty sentiabr'skoi konferentsii PSR, "Ko vsem organizatsiiam PSR" (1 October 1920), Nicolaevsky Collection, box 1, file 12. This was also published in *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 1 (December 1920), 27–28.

³³ *Protokoly TsKa PSR: konferentsiia 25–27 Sentiabria 1920 goda*, PSR Archive, document 2006.

³⁴ "Rezoliutsiia priniataia na konferentsii PSR 8 sentiabria 1920," Ts.P.A., Fond 274, PSR, Opis' 1, document 1, p. 62.

from finished. The last thing the SRs wanted to do was to play into his hands. A full and unambiguous go-ahead for armed insurrection would be possible only when the Whites were defeated. This was the line of reasoning of Chernov, the party leader in October 1920, when he reached Estonia after avoiding capture by the Cheka. He put it this way: "When the bankruptcy of the White Guards' reaction becomes evident, a new era in the anti-Bolshevik struggle will come. This movement will be under democratic banners. The PSR sees its place in the vanguard of this movement. It counts on the enormous forces of the peasantry, who hate the Bolsheviks and who are also inimical to the landlords."³⁵ Chernov went on to say that armed struggle would be protracted, difficult, and complicated by the rise of "spontaneous outbursts of angry masses, but there was no other way."

After the defeat of General Wrangel in November 1920 this last impediment to an SR commitment was removed. Documents in the PSR archives suggest that in the winter of 1920–21 some SR politicians were elaborating a strategy for the peasant war. Colonel Makhin recommended that the armed forces of peasants should rely only on themselves, that is, on the command organs of territorial militias. The example he cited as worthy of emulation was the People's Army militia (*opolchenia*) in the Black Sea coast area. Their command system of territorial headquarters precluded the rise of adventurers and local dictators. The territorial militias consisted of two tiers, active and passive. The passive one could be brought into action when needed. The units of the People's Army should avoid combat with a superior adversary. They were to attack the communications and economic infrastructure of the Bolsheviks. Partisan detachments should serve as cores of fighting forces around which large peasant detachments could be deployed for decisive actions. The military strategic objectives of the Peoples' Army, the document went on, should be the seizure of important administrative centers and the broadening of liberated territory. The ultimate goal was to isolate the Bolsheviks in the cities and deny them access to the countryside, which would lead to a collapse of the Bolshevik regime: "Strategic logic dictates the necessity of starting the popular insurrection on as wide a territory as possible, best of all everywhere. The strength of a simultaneous insurrection everywhere is enormous. No authority is capable of coping with it. The impact of such an insurrection on the morale of the troops defending the regime would be tremendous."³⁶

Chernov himself was involved in trying to establish contact with the Kronstadt sailors and in supplying them with food from Estonia in order to sustain and unfold their insurrection. Plans were worked on for a possible insurrection in Pskov and Novgorod provinces which would link up with the Kronstadt sailors. Other projects were studied. The fact that the SR Central Committee

³⁵ V. Chernov, "O sovremennom polozhenii," *Volia Rossii* (5 October 1920), 2.

³⁶ Makhin in *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 11 (August 1921), 22.

was unable to implement any of these plans does not change the fact that its thinking was developing toward the idea of a general peasant insurrection, led by peasant unions and relying on the territorial militias. However, in its official pronouncements the Central Committee Bureau continued to advocate restraint. A breakdown of communications due to arrests and repressions made any meaningful coordination of party policy on the national scale impossible. Local organizations and individual SRs had to act on their own. All the surviving Central Committee members could do was urge the organization and coordination of a popular upheaval, as one of the CC leaflets of 1921 attests:

Peasant rebellions do not cease. Robbed, shot at, and decimated, the peasantry, this eternal payer [*dannik*], naturally rebels. It rebels spontaneously, often following the wrong path, the path of pogroms, violence, and killings. . . . The Bolsheviks know that the SRs do not cause uprisings and that only in those cases where they show a healthy character of struggle against the Communist dictatorship for the defense of people's rights, and where they are decisively separated from the criminal elements, members of our party are marching in the ranks of the insurgents.³⁷

The conclusion can be drawn that the Central Committee and the CC Bureau consistently advocated caution and restraint, although they welcomed the idea of an insurrection. Like the Mensheviks they were skeptical of the *stikhia* of the Russian muzhik, of a spontaneous and uncontrollable outpouring of wrath. They wanted to plan and orchestrate a perfectly timed revolution under perfect conditions, at a time when real revolution was unfolding in Tambov, Kuban, Saratov, Kronstadt, and Siberia. The opinion of the CC Bureau was, however, not the opinion of the SR party as a whole. The CC did not and could not control local organizations, and it could not control individual members. The record of local organizations in Tambov, Kuban, the lower Volga, and Siberia shows beyond any doubt serious SR involvement in the peasant movement.

Until recently little was known about the Left SRs' role. Relying on bits and pieces of evidence, Oliver Radkey argues that the Left SRs were even more involved in the Antonov movement than the SRs. Yet few documents were available to highlight their policy. The Dzerzhinsky Archive contains a curious document which may shed light on this matter. It is a report of a Cheka agent who infiltrated the Left SR party leadership and, to judge by his duties, held a position of authority himself. Agent Vol'nov attended a meeting of Left SR leaders on 6 March 1921. V. E. Trutovsky, B. D. Kamkov, and Raevskaia were present among others, all top party leaders. They discussed routine business of the party in the context of the Kronstadt rebellion, which was then at full strength. According to agent Vol'nov, the Left SR leaders thought the Kronstadt

³⁷ Tsentral'noe Org. Biuro TsKa PSR, underground leaflet (18 July 1921), PSR Archive, document 2008.

rising was premature, because the countryside was to rise first in accordance with their plans. First the peasant war had to engulf all of rural Russia, and then the cities would rise to finish off the Bolsheviks. Agent Vol'nov described a discussion of the Left SR networks of peasant unions, and of combat detachments. Their main area of concentration was in Voronezh and Tambov provinces as well as in Kuban and the Volga provinces. Moreover the Left SRs had strong underground urban organizations in Petrograd, Voronezh, Saratov, and Nizhni Novgorod. As in the old days the Left SRs also maintained combat detachments and individual terrorists (*boeviki*).

One of the items on the agenda was whether to adopt a draft of text for a leaflet to be printed clandestinely. According to agent Vol'nov, Kamkov said: "The leaflet drafted by Kurbatov is unacceptable because it definitely reveals our attitude to the Bolsheviks. It is particularly unsatisfactory in the part which makes it possible to establish that we have contacts with Antonov's band and generally with all insurgent detachments which operate in Russia, including Kronstadt."³⁸

At the end of the meeting everyone was assigned a specific party task. Vol'nov received addresses of conspiratorial apartments in Tambov where he would be able to find access to Antonov. His assignment was "to establish contact with Antonov, to describe to him the situation in Kronstadt, to inform him about the mood in Moscow, and to let him know the opinion of the Central Committee concerning the beginning of the spring military campaign. The insurrectionary movement must be carried out under the banner of the toiling peasantry." Agent Vol'nov concluded his report expecting guidelines from the Cheka on his mission to Tambov.

This document raises more questions than it answers. What was the nature of the relationship between the Left SR Central Committee and Antonov's headquarters? How strong were the Left SR underground combat detachments? What is certain, however, is that in addition to invisible and invincible peasant networks, which protected rebel armies, there also were invisible urban networks of the SRs and Left SRs which tried and in many ways succeeded in helping peasant leaders organize a functioning infrastructure for their war effort.

The War Effort

On 14 November 1920, at a meeting of the commanders of insurgent regiments, Antonov was elected chief of headquarters. His control over other

³⁸ "Nachá'niku Sekretno-Osvedomitel'nogo Otdela agenturno-osvedomitel'nykh materialov. Svodka No. 27 po doneseniui osvedomitelia Vol'nova" (6 March 1921) (To the chief of the Secret Intelligence Department. Report no. 27 based on the report of agent Vol'nov), Ts.P.A., Dzerzhinsky Archive, Fond 76, Opis' 3, document 167.

commanders was only nominal. And that was predicated on the very nature of the tactics he had chosen to pursue in the fall of 1920. Large peasant formations were ineffective and vulnerable. He dispatched most of the survivors of the march on Tambov home and formed a number of separate detachments which acted pretty much on their own. Of course in theory they were under his command, and if asked to participate in a joint operation they certainly would and did. Yet the methods they chose for their own struggle against the Bolsheviks were their own. They chose whom, when, and how they would strike. This is not to suggest that the degree of organization among Antonov's detachments was poor. On the contrary. The reason Antonov's movement achieved as much as it did was that he had an effective military organization, a guerrilla warfare operation par excellence, similar to that of Struk in Kiev Province. Antonov became a legend. Any ambush against a punitive detachment, any case of rebels distributing seized grain to peasants, must have been the work of Antonov. In December the Kirsanov Bolsheviks, who found themselves in the hotbed of insurrection, described the situation: "Taking into consideration the high degree of organization and the sizable forces of bands operating simultaneously in several areas, we cannot put up serious defense."³⁹ Antonov could not possibly have coordinated let alone commanded attacks at the same time in places separated from each other by one hundred or more versts. Peasant bands in provinces as far away as the Volga basin and Don Host referred to themselves as detachments of the Antonov army.

Antonov's army was, in fact, an alliance of territorial peasant militias. Each district supported its own detachment, which defended its territory. Peasants provided food and intelligence, joined forces for hit-and-run attacks, and then returned to their everyday routine. Most remarkable about this stage of the movement was that the peasant unions developed an intricate network of invisible government that functioned remarkably well. Even though the cities were held by the Bolsheviks, peasant unions, according to Antonov-Ovseenko, were the real authority in the countryside. They managed to conduct mobilizations, rendered aid to families of the Greens, maintained food supplies, and had a sophisticated system of intelligence gathering that stretched out to the Cheka itself in Tambov.⁴⁰ The rural outposts of the rebels, so-called nests, were deep in the countryside, inaccessible to the Bolsheviks, as the Kirsanov Bolsheviks noted: "In the nests no outsiders are admitted."⁴¹ The distinction between the SRs and Left SRs disappeared, and the two branches of the SRs worked amicably together. For all practical purposes they fused into one again.⁴² Each

³⁹ Session of 18 December 1920, "Protokoly zasedanii Kirsanovskogo Uezdnoho komiteta RKP(b), Ts.P.A., Fond 17, Opis' 12, document 566.

⁴⁰ Antonov-Ovseenko, "O Banditskom dvizhenii," *Trotsky Papers*, vol. 2, p. 506.

⁴¹ Session of 18 December 1920, "Protokoly zasedanii Kirsanovskogo Uezdnoho komiteta RKP(b)" (January–December 1920), Ts.P.A., Fond 17, Opis' 12, document 566.

⁴² Documents on joint SR/Left SR work in Tambov are in the PSR collection: session of 16

province peasant union performed the functions of a civilian branch of government, and the chief of headquarters led the military branch. In practice, however, the two branches were quite autonomous of each other. Official SR spokesmen later denied the involvement and responsibility of the SR-led peasant unions in the Antonov movement.⁴³ Their denial was based on the assertion that after Antonov became the commander, the peasant unions were no longer the same as in the summer of 1920. The new unions were Antonov's unions. That may well be true, but the same people except those who had been arrested were in both. In fact Boltnev, one of the SR peasant union leaders, became a commissar in Antonov's army.⁴⁴

The peasant unions had no influence, however, on the conduct of military operations. When a Bolshevik punitive detachment entered a village, the Greens abstained from outward hostility, taught by the lesson of Khitrovo. Yet once the detachment was outside the village, on a road in the woods, it would be ambushed and preferably executed to the last man, so that the survivors could not supply information on the number of rebels, their effectiveness, weaponry, and so on. Many a Bolshevik detachment simply vanished in the Tambov countryside. As in Kiev and Kuban, the Greens killed all Communists they seized and let soldiers go home. Radkey interpreted Antonov's reluctance to attack cities as a sign of weakness. Yet it seems that this was a chosen course of action. The Kirsanov Bolsheviks wrote on 18 December: "The city [Kirsanov] has become completely isolated. It does not pose any difficulty for Antonov to take it."⁴⁵ Antonov avoided cities because there his rebels would be vulnerable and exposed. By the end of December 1920 the Green rebels reigned supreme in the Tambov countryside. Not only were the Bolsheviks unable to collect their tribute; they could not be certain they would come out of this ordeal alive. Protocols of the Kirsanov Bolsheviks betray this sense of helplessness and panic: "The bands are growing in numbers more and more. . . . We do not have our own forces at all. . . . The bands openly do whatever they please without any restraint, and do not encounter any resistance anywhere."⁴⁶

As a result of such pervasive fears the Bolsheviks began to take out their frustration on the suspect population. A license to kill without restraint was inaugurated by an order of the province Cheka of September 1920: "In regard to rebels and those hiding rebels [it is imperative] to conduct a merciless Red Terror . . . to arrest in such families all members older than 18 years of age,

April 1920, "Protokoly Tska PSR. Otchety, doklady mestnykh organizatsii SR," Ts.P.A., Fond 274, Opis' 1, PSR, document 7.

⁴³ Iu. N. Podbel'skii, "Zaiavlenie predsedateliu Moskovskogo soveta," PSR Archive, document 2032, in Jansen, ed., *Partiia Sotsialistov Revoliutsionerov posle Oktiabr'skogo perevorota*, p. 554.

⁴⁴ Radkey, *The Unknown Civil War in Russia*, p. 193.

⁴⁵ Session of 18 December 1920, "Protokoly zasedanii Kirsanovskogo Uezdnoho komiteta RKP(b)" (January–December 1920), Ts.P.A., Fond 17, Opis' 12, document 566.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

regardless of gender, and to execute those if bandit attacks continue . . . [and] to burn or destroy their houses. Extraordinary indemnities should be imposed on these villages, and if they fail to pay, all land and all property should be confiscated."⁴⁷

This was a declaration of war on the entire population. The collection of "indemnity" or the seizure of "bandit family members" meant in practice the freedom to loot and rape. One Tsiplukhinov raped several arrested girls. In a place called Talinki the Reds locked up all the women in the church, searched and robbed the houses, and raped two girls.⁴⁸ In another village they massacred fifty adolescent boys and two women. In another village, Krasnaia Sloboda, a Red detachment passing through killed one woman, two old men, and twenty-two adolescent boys. All of them were simply seized on the main street.⁴⁹ Antonov-Ovseenko admitted in his report that local authorities "were trying to conduct Red Terror and burned villages."⁵⁰ Likewise the Cheka reported to Lenin that "in areas engulfed by the bandit rebellion, the disposition of the rural population toward Soviet power is hostile due to the systematic plunder of our troops."⁵¹

These were not merely ruthless measures to "pacify the countryside" or excesses of unruly commanders, nor were they merely acts of vengeance on a hostile countryside. The local Bolshevik policy was abdication of all restraint. It was a graphic manifestation of the dominant attitude: "I am your tsar and lord, and I will do with you what I please." It was the ultimate realization of boundless power over the population—a capacity to rape and kill for pleasure.

These measures escalated the level of hostilities. In January–February 1921 the peasant war entered a new stage. This was perhaps the lowest point for the Bolsheviks. Rebel detachments swelled with new fighters. In some villages all the male population went into the forests. According to Antonov-Ovseenko, the total strength of rebels reached forty thousand.⁵² This figure is in accord with protocols of the Kirsanov Uezd Bolsheviks: "Military Commissar Zimin has pointed out that the source of Antonov's reinforcements is the massive development of desertion in the uezd. There are twenty thousand deserters in the uezd, and all of them go willingly into the bands."⁵³ As in Ukraine, a large

⁴⁷ This order was issued by the Operational Headquarters of the province Cheka on 1 September 1920. See "Tambovskie krestiane i vlast'," *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 14–15 (November–December 1921), 32.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Antonov-Ovseenko, "O Banditskom dvizhenii," *Trotsky Papers*, vol. 2, p. 506.

⁵¹ "Operativno-Informatsionnaia svodka Vecheka," (10 March 1921), Ts.P.A., Dzerzhinsky Archive, Fond 76, Opis' 3, document 167.

⁵² Antonov-Ovseenko, "O Banditskom dvizhenii," *Trotsky Papers*, vol. 2, p. 504.

⁵³ Session of 18 December 1920, "Protokoly zasedanii Kirsanovskogo Uezdnogo komiteta RKP(b)" (January–December 1920), Ts.P.A., Fond 17, Opis' 12, document 566.

proportion of rebels were deserters from the Red Army. The Bolsheviks could not be certain that Red Army soldiers would not join the rebels, as had happened so many times in the past. Their fears were partly justified, because the SRs and the Left SRs published leaflets and appeals to workers and soldiers, as a top secret Cheka report to Dzerzhinsky attests: "According to the available information, the workers of Rtishchevo station have resolved, under the influence of SR propaganda, to send a delegation to the Red Army units of the Tambov group, located nearby, in order to negotiate a cease-fire."⁵⁴ To diminish the chances of fraternization, the Bolsheviks encouraged soldiers' unrestrained behavior. Once they felt they were masters over the peasants, they would not be inclined to fraternize. This in turn led to an intensification of cruelty and reprisals by the rebels. As in the Kuban and Don Host areas, they began to attack not only the Communists and detachments of all kinds but also anyone associated with Soviet power and their families.

It is at this point, it seems, that Antonov began to lose overall control of his forces. New bands mushroomed, naming themselves detachments of the Antonov army in Tambov and in areas as far away as Samara Province. Just as Antonov did not ask permission from the Tambov SRs, they did not ask Antonov's permission for their actions. They began killing Communists and their families, suspected informers, and sympathizers indiscriminately. Particularly notorious were the bands of Vaska Karas', Selianskii, and Brusok. Such terror against Red Army soldiers' families and Communist "collaborators," as in Ukraine, actually undermined the cohesiveness of the anti-Bolshevik movement and weakened its support among the local population. Antonov's headquarters tried to preserve control, and Brusok was executed for marauding. But this could not stop the escalation of peasant wrath into its own free-for-all. In the judgment of Antonov-Ovseenko: "The struggle against marauders, drunkenness, and card playing was, judging by the issued orders, doggedly pursued, but it yielded no results."⁵⁵

The ethos of the movement seems to have changed from that of a relatively disciplined and well-coordinated peasant guerrilla warfare in the fall of 1920 into vengeance combined with a carnival-like atmosphere in the spring of 1921. "Life is short! Life is cheap, yours and theirs. Let's drink and have fun!" These were favorite expressions of these men. Survival on the run and killing enemies became a way of life. The slogan of some detachments was Loot the Looters. The Bolsheviks had stolen grain from peasants; now it was time to steal it from the Bolsheviks. The goal was to settle accounts, an eye for an eye, blow for blow. Observers referred to this phenomenon as warlordism (*partizanshchina*). It was similar in its spirit to the Bolsheviks' Loot the Looters campaign of 1917–18. Then, peasants were incited by the Bolsheviks to loot

⁵⁴ "Operativno-Informatsionnaia svodka Vecheka," (10 March 1921), Ts.P.A., Dzerzhinsky Archive, Fond 76, SNK, Opis' 3, document 167.

⁵⁵ Antonov-Ovseenko, "O Banditskom dvizhenii," *Trotsky Papers*, vol. 2, p. 502.

the noble estates. Now the Bolshevik occupants of the former noble estates were the chief victims of the new campaign. Perhaps this profound continuity in the spirit of the Russian popular movement suggests that to seek "programs" in peasant movements is to miss the point entirely. Intellectuals and city folks compose programs. The peasants' program was no program but revenge, based on their own idea of justice and right order.

Lower Volga

The lower Volga area (Tsaritsyn, Saratov, Samara, and Simbirsk, as well as surrounding areas toward the Urals in the east and toward Penza in the West) should all be considered as another Tambov. An uninterrupted peasant war raged in this area from the late spring of 1920 until August 1922. Like Tambov this area was also an SR stronghold. The difference was that it had a much more diverse ethnic composition: Russians and Germans in Saratov, Mordovians and Tatars north along the Volga, Kirghiz in the south, and Orenburg cossacks eastward from the Volga. As in Tambov, peasant war in this area was associated with specific individuals who were well known and admired, first with A. P. Sapozhnikov and Serov and then with Vakhulin and F. G. Popov. In their political orientation these people were closer to Makhno than to Antonov. They were former Soviet functionaries and Red Army commanders. Like Makhno they broke with the Bolsheviks when they came to the conclusion that the Bolsheviks were treating the peasants unfairly. A. P. Sapozhnikov was an SR-like Antonov. Then he became a Left SR and then acted on his own. Indeed defending the "toiling peasantry" from Bolshevik exploitation was one of the main goals of the Left SRs. From their point of view the Bolsheviks had betrayed the principles of Soviet power as the power of the people. Therefore the people had the right to rise against the new oppressors. This is exactly what Sapozhnikov did.

In July 1920 the division Sapozhnikov led decided to rebel against Soviet power. The Cheka reported that his detachment was two thousand strong. It had field artillery and machine guns. What was more worrisome, continued the report, was that "there is a real possibility that seven or eight regiments will go over to the side of Sapozhnikov."⁵⁶ Mutinied soldiers, runaway deserters, and peasant partisans flocked to the band of Sapozhnikov. Local Bolsheviks and the Cheka sent telegrams to Moscow in panic, reporting that workers in the area were passing resolutions in support of Sapozhnikov, demanding free elections to the soviets, free trade, and the removal of all the Jews.⁵⁷ Sapozhnikov became a leader of a broad-based movement. His proclamations incorporated

⁵⁶ "Informatsionnaia Svodka Sekretnogo Otdela Vecheka tovarishchu Leninu" (1-15 August 1920), Ts.G.A.O.R., Fond 130, SNK, Opis' 3, document 414.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

the demands of his constituency; they called for new elections of the soviets, abolition of the requisitioning detachments, abolition of the Cheka, and free trade.⁵⁸ On 2 August, Lenin instructed local comrades in a classified cable: "Any manifestation of sympathy and even more of collaboration with Sapozhnikov by the local population must be rooted out at once, making use to the full of revolutionary authority; in cases when collaboration has taken place, demand from settlements lying on the route of Sapozhnikov's detachments that they hand over the guilty ringleaders and take hostages so as to forestall any possibility of collaboration."⁵⁹ In the fall of 1920 Sapozhnikov's detachment of three thousand was finally defeated by a superior Bolshevik force. Serov took command over the remnants of his forces.

As early as December 1920 the Bolsheviks had to face another mutiny, another uprising, and another peasant army, this one led by Vakhulin. Like Sapozhnikov, Vakhulin had been a Red Army commander and at one point in 1919 served under Nestor Makhno. Like Makhno, Vakhulin led his cavalry battalion into mutiny against the Bolsheviks. Cossacks, deserters, and freed political prisoners flocked to his army, and it grew to six thousand in less than two months. In February 1921 Vakhulin fell in battle and Popov, a Don cossack, assumed command. Popov's rebels ransacked warehouses, killed Communists, tore up rail tracks, and distributed some captured goods to peasants. Peasant crowds, several thousand strong, attacked grain storage facilities. The Volga District Red Army commander reported: "Recently peasant uprisings, caused by starvation, have flared up throughout the district, especially in those points where the largest quantities of grain have been extracted, and also thanks to bungling by food supply officials. A week ago Samara Province was in the same position as Saratov is now. The peasants of Stavropol, Buzuluk, Buguruslan, Samara, and other uezdy were gathering in crowds up to several thousand strong—in some places they exceeded ten thousand—and tried to break down food supply storage facilities."⁶⁰

Some peasant uprisings were reported as triggered by famine. The Saratov Bolshevik party committee admitted that Soviet troops were in fact passing arms over to the rebels.⁶¹ Lunacharsky wrote to Lenin in early February 1921 that he had reached the conclusion that it was necessary to dispatch armed forces to Saratov Province, which could not defeat the Green detachments on its own.

⁵⁸ Figes, *Peasant Russia, Civil War*, p. 339.

⁵⁹ "Lenin to Ural'sk: for the Rev. Com. of Ural'sk Province, and to Presidium of the Executive Committee of Saratov Soviet" (2 August 1920), *Trotsky Papers*, vol. 2, document 571, p. 236.

⁶⁰ "Conversation between 1st Assistant Chief of Staff Comrade Shaposhnikov and the Commander of the Trans-Volga Military District, Kraevsky" (23 March 1921), *Trotsky Papers*, vol. 2, document 676, p. 416.

⁶¹ "Trotsky to Chairman of the Commission for the Struggle against Banditry" (Moscow, 19 March 1921), copies to the Org. Bureau, Lenin, and Stalin, *Trotsky Papers*, vol. 2, document 674, p. 410.

The situation deteriorated so much that it threatened to turn into a war similar in scale to that in Tambov Province. Lenin demanded that "banditry" be liquidated and that he be informed twice a week on the progress of operations.⁶² Most striking in the communications of top Bolshevik leaders is a lack of consideration of any measures other than propaganda and retribution. In March, Saratov authorities pleaded for help: "The whole work of the province is paralyzed; in those places where the bandits passed through, the Soviet regime is not recognized; towns are completely sacked by the bandits; the levies of grain cannot be met; the towns of the province are threatened by hunger riots."⁶³ Lunacharsky felt it was imperative to unite the military command against peasant rebels "along the entire front of Tambov, Voronezh, and Saratov provinces."⁶⁴ He should have added Samara and Simbirsk to the north and Tsaritsyn, Astrakhan, and Don to the south and southwest. Local commanders complained that there were not enough forces available to contain the numerous bands and riots in such a huge area. According to a local reporter: "Most likely we have entered a period of anarchy. It is hardly possible to find an uezd or a province where there is no large or small detachment, wandering around in search of its task. Echoes of Antonov's movement in Tambov from one direction and of the movement of Popov near Saratov from the other reach our area (Tsaritsyn Uezd and Don). In addition a partisan detachment of Kolesnikov is operating at the border of Don Host country and Voronezh Province."⁶⁵

Hardly would the Bolsheviks announce the defeat and capture of one peasant rebel leader than another one's band would appear and menace them in an unknown and unexpected location. Despite a large concentration of forces and a string of military victories over the rebels the overall situation continued to deteriorate for the Bolsheviks in the entire lower Volga area. A new and unknown band of Maslakov was reported to Lenin as operating in the Tsaritsyn and Astrakhan area. The Astrakhan party committee reported to Moscow that the rebellion led by Maslakov "threatened to consume [*zaniat*'] the entire province."⁶⁶ The local Cheka chief wrote that the food supply for Astrakhan was all stored in Tsaritsyn and that the band could seize it. Lenin jotted down on this report: "Comrade Trotsky, we must exert the utmost pressure and

⁶² Lenin to Skliansky (6 February 1921), *Trotsky Papers*, vol. 2, document 654, p. 372.

⁶³ "From: Province Party Committee: Martynov; Province Executive Committee: Fedor Ivanov; Province Cheka: Smidovich; to: Lenin, Trotsky, and CC of the RCP," (Saratov, 19 March 1921), *Trotsky Papers*, vol. 2, document 672, pp. 406-8.

⁶⁴ Lunacharsky, "Otchet o Saratovskoi rabote" (14 February 1921), "Doklady Lunacharskogo Leninu," *Literaturnoe Nasledstvo*, vol. 81, p. 490.

⁶⁵ "S Iugo-vostoka Rossii," *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 10 (July 1921), 26.

⁶⁶ Pis'ma i telegrammy Astrakhanskogo Gubkoma, "O povstancheskom dvizhenii krestian," Ts.P.A., TsKa RKP(b), Fond 17, Opis' 84, Biuro Sekretariata, document 62.

destroy Maslakov.”⁶⁷ So the local commanders and Cheka tried harder in Tsaritsyn, but new bands emerged in neighboring provinces. From the Tsaritsyn and Astrakhan area Maslakov’s bands spread to the neighboring Don Cossack lands. The Cheka in Rostov-on-Don telegraphed to Dzerzhinsky: “Maslakov’s bands are located in the vicinity of Orlovka Village. Our units dispatched to liquidate this band; [350] persons have voluntarily gone over to the side of Maslakov. . . . The situation in the Don area we consider to be grave, requiring the adoption of extraordinary measures.”⁶⁸ What was particularly worrisome for the Bolshevik leaders was that Sapozhnikov, Maslakov, and other peasant leaders in the lower Volga region attracted into their bands ever growing numbers of Red Army soldiers who had been dispatched against them.

The Saratov Bolsheviks reported to Lenin in March 1921 that “banditry in recent times has embraced the entire province. The peasants seized three million pud of grain from state warehouses. They armed themselves thanks to a flow of weapons received from deserters.”⁶⁹ Lenin’s telegrams still insisted on a military solution, hostage taking, and the liquidation of “banditry.” But it was not easy. Military operations documents clearly attest that the army could not handle all the bands at the same time.⁷⁰ Fronts appeared here and there and everywhere, and keeping occupation forces in faraway corners of many provinces was not possible because of supply and transportation problems. In the spring of 1921 the lower Volga, Tambov, and parts of Penza and Voronezh provinces were ungovernable. This was in addition to the ongoing peasant war in all provinces of Ukraine and in Kuban. In all the provinces of the lower Volga the Communists declared a state of siege.⁷¹ This empowered the Cheka, punitive detachments, and Internal Security troops to shoot enemies of the proletarian dictatorship on sight, take hostages from civilian populations to root out their collaboration with the enemy, set up concentration camps—in a word to do all those things the Bolsheviks had already been doing in Ukraine and the Cossack lands. Yet despite an all-out effort on the peasant front this time victory

⁶⁷ “From: Chairman of the Province Cheka: Chekasskii, Chairman of Province CP Committee: Riabov, to: Lenin and Dzerzhinsky” (18 March 1921), *Trotsky Papers*, vol. 2, document 670, pp. 402–4, here 404.

⁶⁸ Telegram to Dzerzhinsky (3 March 1921), Ts.P.A., Dzerzhinsky Archive, Fond 76, SNK, Opis’ 3, document 167.

⁶⁹ Frenkin, *Tragediia krest’ianskikh vosstanii v Rossii, 1918–1921*, p. 119.

⁷⁰ “Conversation between 1st Assistant Chief of Staff Comrade Shaposhnikov and the Commander of the Trans-Volga Military District, Kraevsky” (23 March 1921), *Trotsky Papers*, vol. 2, document 676, p. 420.

⁷¹ “Kratkii otchet predsedatelia Simbirskogo Gubispolkoma o vvedenii chrezvychainogo polozheniia v Simbirskoi gubernii” (21 May 1921), Ts.G.A.O.R., Fond 1235, VTsIK, Opis’ 99, document 10, pp. 1–2, and “Postanovlenie Prezidiuma VTsIK o vvedenii chrezvychainogo polozheniia v Samarskoi gubernii” (16 March 1921), Ts.G.A.O.R., Fond 1235, VTsIK, Opis’ 38, document 15, p. 2.

eluded the Bolsheviks. In February and March 1921 two more uprisings broke out which almost broke the back of Soviet power: Kronstadt and Siberia.

The Urals and Siberia

What is striking about the Green movement across the country is how similar the situation was in areas and provinces hundreds of miles away from one another. Observers, participants, and eyewitnesses in Tobol'sk, for example, could not possibly have known what another eyewitness wrote at the same time from Kuban or Don or Tambov. Peasant war everywhere had the same causes, the same recognizable stages, and the same unfortunate end. The dynamics of the Green movement in the Urals and Siberia followed the pattern of the Don and Kuban area almost exactly. Welcome to the Reds in spring gave way to anti-Bolshevik insurgency in the summer of 1920. The difference was that the peasant war in western Siberia was the most successful in military terms. A huge area was cleared of Bolsheviks. It was, in fact, the only area in Lenin's Russia where peasant rebels managed to seize several cities and towns, hold them for two or three months, and establish their own peasant political authority. This makes the Tobol'sk uprising the most interesting episode in the saga of the peasant war.

Siberian peasants, like the cossacks of the Don and Kuban, had a strong tradition of self-rule, self-reliance, and regional patriotism. The less they felt the presence of a central government, the better a government it was for them. Like the peasants of Stavropol who had fought against Denikin, many Siberian peasant detachments fought against Kolchak. Moreover, the Kolchak regime collapsed under the blows of the peasant detachments before the arrival of the Red Army in Irkutsk at the end of 1919. Initially peasants welcomed the Red Army troops as liberators. They knew very little about the Bolsheviks at that time. Their rule had been overthrown in Siberia in the late spring and summer of 1918 by the Czechs and SRs, well before committees of the poor or any other Bolshevik innovations. The arrival of the Bolsheviks in January 1920 was perceived as the end of the civil war and of the arbitrary requisitions and hardships the peasants had endured at the hands of the Kolchak administration.

For the Moscow Bolsheviks, Siberia was first and foremost a land of plenty. Their slogan was To Siberia for Bread. They arrived with the clear intention of pumping as much grain out of Siberia as possible for the "starving provinces of central Russia." The reality exceeded their expectations. By the standards of central Russia the Siberian muzhik was rich. It was not uncommon for a peasant family to cultivate up to eighty desiatin of land and own a dozen cows, bulls, horses, and pigs. For the Bolsheviks, Siberian peasants were kulaks, pure and simple. Why should they have so much when the workers of central Russia

were starving? The Bolsheviks regarded Siberia in terms of what it could give them. So they decided to help themselves to the riches of Siberian peasants.

Collection targets were set high and were strictly enforced. According to a CPC decree of July 1920, Tomsk, Omsk, Semipalatinsk, Altai, Enisei, and Irkutsk provinces were obligated to deliver 110 million pud of grain from 1 August 1920 to 1 March 1921.⁷² Since in 1913 Siberia had exported 400 million pud of grain, the Bolsheviks reasoned, the delivery target of 200 million pud for 1920 was a modest figure. The difference of course was that 1913 was before the war, when Siberia exported grain for real money. In 1920 it was forced to "share" its riches facing the barrel of a gun. In Irkutsk Province, for example, if a peasant had one cow, he had to deliver eight pounds of butter; if he had two cows, sixteen pounds of butter; three cows, twenty-four pounds.⁷³ Requisition detachments confiscated "surplus" foodstuffs for the needs of the "starving workers in central Russia."

A carting obligation was introduced. Peasants had to cart troops, food, and even furniture for Communist functionaries.⁷⁴ Since there was only one railroad in Siberia, virtually all supplies were transported by peasant carts to railway stations or river ports. As in the rest of Russia, the Bolsheviks began to set up collective and state farms. Peasants from surrounding villages were "conscripted" to work on these farms as a part of their labor obligation. In some areas the new authorities mobilized the entire population of villages for construction projects. Needless to say, the system of unpaid conscripted labor and unpaid-for food deliveries generated all kinds of abuses, especially since the enormous distances from Moscow made control over local authorities virtually impossible. Very quickly the image of Soviet power changed. It was now seen as a rule of requisition detachments, Rev. Coms, and the Cheka. As a local saying joked: "We have exchanged Kolchak for a province Cheka [*promeniali Kolchaka na gubcheka*]."⁷⁵ Thousands of peasants were arrested for failing to deliver their quota. In Barnaul and Novonikolaevsk (Novosibirsk) several thousand peasants were held prisoner.⁷⁶ As in the rest of Russia, peasants responded by slaughtering their cattle. In 1917 Siberia had 9,600,000 head of cattle; in 1920 only 3,400,000 remained.

After five months of Bolshevik rule a series of peasant uprisings began, as the Cheka reported to Lenin:

Novonikolaevsk: The actions of peasant insurgents continue. The uprising is spreading along the railroad line Novonikolaevsk—Omsk.

⁷² Frenkin, *Tragediia Krest'ianskikh vosstanii v Rossii, 1918–1921*, p. 123.

⁷³ "Vosstaniia v Sibiri," *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 6 (April 1921), 30.

⁷⁴ "Polozhenie na Urale. (Pis'mo iz Ekaterinburga)," *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 4 (March 1921), 30–32.

⁷⁵ P. Turchanskii, "Krestianskoe vosstanie v Zapadnoi Sibiri," *Sibirskii arkhiv* (1929), 67–72, here 68.

⁷⁶ "Pis'ma iz Sibiri. Pis'mo iz Irkutsk," *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 12–13 (September–October 1921), 43–48, here 44.

Barnaul: A new wave of insurgency is unfolding.

Tomsk: During the first half of July rebellions flared up frequently. They have engulfed the entire province.⁷⁷

Several peasant bands appeared in May 1920 in Semipalatinsk Province and in the Altai Mountains, led by G. F. Rogov, I. P. Novoselov, and I. D. Plotnikov.⁷⁸ The most serious was the uprising in Tomsk Province, in the vicinity of Kolyvan' Township. When the rebels seized Kolyvan', they executed all the Communists they could put their hands on, three hundred of them.⁷⁹ Several thousand rebels were executed after the uprising was suppressed. In September–October 1920, when the Bolsheviks started enforcing collection targets for the new crop, several peasant insurgencies flared up simultaneously in various parts of Siberia. There were three types of rebel detachments in Irkutsk Province: those of the People's Revolutionary Peasant Army, as it called itself, those of Buriats (including the native non-Russian population), and those led by former Kolchak army officers.⁸⁰ These partisans had nothing in common with each other, and the People's Army was openly hostile to Kolchak officers. The People's Army was led by V. M. Chernov (not the SR party leader), said to be of peasant origin and formerly a junior officer.⁸¹ Chernov's detachments controlled eight volosti in the northern part of Irkutsk Province by the end of September 1920. They disbanded Rev.Coms and the food supply administration and killed Communists systematically. They displayed a remarkable degree of organization and carried through a mobilization in those eight volosti that yielded six thousand fighters. Women and children in villages exposed to Bolshevik attack were evacuated to distant villages away from main roads. The rebels' main slogans were Down with the Collection Target! (*Razverstka*), Down with the Communists! and Long Live the Soviets, the same slogans that a few months later would be heard at the other end of Russia in Kronstadt. In late fall Chernov's detachment was defeated, the rebel volosti were reoccupied, and the peasants severely punished.

In early 1921, however, insurgency flared up again, this time simultaneously in a huge territory of several provinces. Several peasant detachments reappeared in Altai, in Barnaul, and in the Biisk area, again led by I. P. Novoselov and P. K. Lubkov, several thousand rebels strong.⁸² Defeated three times in

⁷⁷ "Informatsionnaia Svodka Sekretного Otdela Vecheka tovarishchu Leninu" (16–31 July and 1–15 August 1920), Ts.G.A.O.R., Fond 130, SNK, Opis' 3, document 414.

⁷⁸ For a survey of literature on this rebellion, see V. I. Shishkin, "Eshche raz o Rogove i Rogovshchine," in Plotnikova, ed., *Oktiabr' i grazhdanskaia voina v sibir. Istoriia, Istoriografiia i Istochnikovedenie*, pp. 102–11.

⁷⁹ "Informatsionnaia Svodka Sekretного Otdela Vecheka tovarishchu Leninu" (1–15 August 1920), Ts.G.A.O.R., Fond 130, SNK, Opis' 3, document 414.

⁸⁰ "Perelom v Krestianstve. (Pis'mo iz Irkutsk), " *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 10 (July 1921), 27.

⁸¹ "Vosstaniia v Sibiri," *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 6 (April 1921), 30.

⁸² "Pis'ma iz Sibiri. Pis'mo iz Irkutsk," *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 12–13 (September–October 1921), 43–48, here 46.

1920, Novoselov raised new detachments each time and reappeared to "exterminate" local Communists. The slogan of Novoselov's rebels was Soviet Power without the Communists.

By far the most serious of all was the Tobol'sk insurgency. It started at a very opportune moment for the rebels, in February 1921, when the Bolsheviks were busy with the Kronstadt rebellion. The Tobol'sk uprising started simultaneously in a huge territory including the Tobol'sk and parts of the Omsk (Akmolinsk) areas. As in Tambov in September 1920, peasants from villages near Tobol'sk started a march on the city, attracting on their way ever growing masses of peasants.⁸³ Local Communists panicked and abandoned the city, retreating toward Tyumen. Upon hearing the news of the Bolshevik overthrow one volost' after another rose and pursued the retreating Bolsheviks.

The absence of good roads, the vast distances, and the unanimous support of the local population for the rebels, in addition to the panic of the Bolsheviks about the news from Kronstadt, made it possible for the rebels to seize the initiative. The area controlled by the rebels continued to broaden along the banks of Irtysh River. They seized the townships of Ishim, Tobol'sk, Berezovo, Obdorsk, Barabinsk, Kainsk, and Petropavlovsk. They destroyed large sections of the trans-Siberian railroad. A stream of Red Army defectors brought badly needed rifles and even machine guns. A key role in the rebel forces was played by former Red Army soldiers, demobilized from the Red Army after the Polish war. They had combat experience, and they were appalled by stories of abuse they heard from their families upon their return.

Retreating Bolshevik forces took hostages from the towns and villages they passed and executed them upon retreat: in Tobol'sk 20, in Obdorsk 219. As an eyewitness recalled, the rebels initially did not have any political program at all. Down with the Communists! was the entire program. Peasants were saying: "It cannot be worse than it is now." All Communist institutions were naturally destroyed and all Communists seized and killed. According to an SR eyewitness, the rebels did not have any plan or any system of administration at all. The key principle was that every volost' was to be essentially self-governing. The central headquarters in Tobol'sk had very little overall control over the territory cleared of Bolsheviks. However, compared with other areas where villages and towns were taken by Greens, such as under Makhno, the Tobol'sk rebels demonstrated a very high degree of organization. Towns under Makhno were not governed at all. In Tambov Province the Green government was well organized, but the Greens never took a town. In Tobol'sk peasant organizations were well organized and led by SRs, as in Tambov, and they did seize towns and set up an administration.

⁸³ N. A. Obranovskii, "Tobol'skoe anti-kommunisticheskoe vosstanie pervoi poloviny 1921 goda. (zametki ochevidtsa)," *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 14–15 (November–December 1921), 33–37.

Civilian authority in the city of Tobol'sk was in the hands of a peasant soviet, composed of representatives of peasants from the surrounding countryside, city residents, and representatives of liberated volosti, two from each. They also formed a Food Supply Board, which worked with the Northern Cooperatives Union. In the villages the peasants' cooperatives, frequently led by SRs, quickly turned into agencies for the supply of the People's army. The Siberian peasant union was the main organizing force of the uprising.⁸⁴ And the commander of the headquarters of the People's Army in the Ishimsk-Petropavlovsk region was a Socialist Revolutionary, Vadim Rodin, a teacher.

As in the Volga area, SR organizations and influence were very strong in Siberia. The very use of a political vocabulary—Peasant union, Constituent Assembly, and People's Army—made it clear to any contemporary that this uprising was guided by SR terminology and values. The official SR party leadership tried to downplay SR involvement in the Siberian uprisings, because it disapproved of them and was trying to protect the party from Cheka terror. Yet Siberian SR organizations, as we have seen, were more anti-Bolshevik than the party center, and they, especially those associated with the cooperatives, pursued their own policy. The rebels avoided theorizing about the political program or state order. Most often they said: "For right now, we are fighting the Communists, and after that we'll see." Whatever there'll be, it won't be worse than under the Communists."⁸⁵

In the township of Surgut the rebels founded a Provisional Committee of Public Safety, which replaced the city soviet. Two weeks later they formed the Surgut Headquarters for the Struggle against Communists. It was hard for an SR reporter to comprehend the intensity of peasant hatred for the Communists: "In general the Communists were destroyed with a kind of stubborn steadfastness. They were looked upon as some kind of separate breed that had no place under the sun. Detachments that were formed in the rear [of rebel territory] and going to the front exterminated all Communists on their way who had somehow survived up to their arrival. More than one hundred Communists were killed in this way, especially nonlocal ones."⁸⁶

Since the Bolsheviks persecuted the bourgeoisie, the peasant rebels released them from prisons. They reasoned, "It was fine under the *burzhui*. Although they get rich they let others live as well," whereas the Communists would not let anyone do well. Tobol'sk headquarters started publishing a newspaper, "*The Voice of the People's Army*," devoted mostly to news from the front. In a remarkably short time the peasant rebels created a functioning administration in a large area. They announced a mobilization of all of the male population up to

⁸⁴ Frenkin, *Tragediia Krest'ianskikh vosstanii v Rossii, 1918–1921*, p. 123.

⁸⁵ N. A. Obranovskii, "Tobol'skoe anti-kommunisticheskoe vosstanie pervoi poloviny 1921 goda. (zametki ochevidtza)," *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 14–15 (November–December 1921), 33–37.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

thirty-five years of age without any means to enforce it, and yet it was successfully carried out on a voluntary basis.⁸⁷ At the peak of the rebel successes in mid-March 1921 the People's Army was sixty thousand strong, the largest concentration of peasant rebel forces in one area at one time.⁸⁸ The province peasant union organized several peasant congresses over a huge territory. Plans were made for an All-Siberian Constituent Assembly. In the first months of 1921 the rebels controlled parts or all of Tyumen, Omsk, Chelyabinsk, and Yenisseisk provinces. Optimists believed that if the movement were successful and Siberia cleared of the Bolsheviks, it would serve as a model for the rest of the country.

Only in April, more than a month after Kronstadt, did the Bolsheviks manage to concentrate sufficient forces to overwhelm the People's Army. This was a time of heavy fighting. Again some Red Army soldiers refused to shoot peasants and others changed sides, but the front steadily moved northward; one volost after another was occupied by the Reds. As practiced already by that date in Kuban, the Bolsheviks executed every fifth or every tenth person in rebel villages.⁸⁹ As an eyewitness testified: "The wrath of the Chekists hit the village clergy particularly hard. They were exterminated almost to the last man. In Tobol'sk Diocese [*eparkhiia*] alone they executed more than a hundred priests."⁹⁰ The exact number of those executed by the Bolsheviks is not known. A local resident who returned to the area half a year after the defeat wrote that in the Golyshmanovo station a Troika for the Struggle with Banditry had condemned and executed about five hundred people. The amnesty which was announced after the suppression brought many rebels back to their homes from the forests, where they were hiding. Yet many of them were later arrested anyway. Some smaller detachments of Greens continued to assault food supply detachments in the fall of 1921 as well, but the movement was crushed, and some of the same Bolsheviks returned to the same Rev.Coms and Chekas.

Suppression

In the Volga basin provinces particularly but also in Tambov, Don, and Kuban, Red Army soldiers, as we have seen, often mutinied and joined the rebels. This hampered the suppression of the peasant movement severely. In the course of that war on the internal front the Bolsheviks devised different kinds of armed forces to deal specifically with the insurgency. What they needed most were reliable troops. In Tambov they deployed cadets of the Red officers' schools, for

⁸⁷ P. Turchanskii, "Krestianskoe vosstanie v Zapadnoi Sibiri," *Sibirskii arkhiv* (1929), 69.

⁸⁸ "Pis'ma iz Sibiri. Pis'mo iz Irkutsk," *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 12-13 (September-October 1921), 45.

⁸⁹ P. Turchanskii, "Krestianskoe vosstanie v Zapadnoi Sibiri," *Sibirskii arkhiv* (1929), 71.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

example. But these were not sufficient. The main force they deployed were the so-called units for special assignment (ChON) and Internal Security troops (Vokhra and VNUS) under the direct command of Dzerzhinsky's deputies. These troops had a large percentage of Communists and of foreigners: Hungarians, Latvians, and Chinese. In the Urals military district, for example, six brigades "servicing the area," as a report put it, numbered 20,408. The Moscow military district, by comparison, had eight brigades with a total strength of 27,128.⁹¹ What is remarkable, though, is that despite impressive numbers in comparison with the strength of the rebels in a given area and despite controlling railroads, food supplies, and communications, the Bolsheviks were unable to stamp out the Greens using Internal Security and Cheka forces alone. They had to engage regular army units and run the risk of new mutinies. That is why it was a matter of utmost importance for the Bolsheviks to be informed about the soldiers' political outlook.

Special departments in the armed forces regularly monitored soldiers' letters home and cited extracts from those letters in their reports.⁹² In September 1920 in the Urals a special conference of informers took place designed to perfect methods of information gathering on the political outlook of soldiers. The conference generated many new and innovative ideas on how to lift the monitoring of political views to new heights: "The congress of informers took place from 6 to 10 September. All the delegates except one were Communists or candidates. The main item on the agenda was the question of daily compilation of data and methods of improving information gathering in the military district. On the first item on the agenda, the congress found that daily compilation is necessary . . . and a further strengthening of the information apparatus is essential."⁹³ So the congress resolved that in the military units it was necessary to create a special new job, chief of the information table. These chiefs "would be engaged exclusively with information gathering and would have no other obligations." The duty of all Communists was likewise to report any counter-revolutionary views they might encounter. Other informers were in charge of initiating conversations with soldiers and testing their attitudes. A refined and professional mind control service dedicated to enforcing correct political attitudes was in the making. The Bolsheviks were very inventive. Since their reliance on naked force had failed to prop up the crumbling Soviet power in the countryside, they had to define a more effective policy for the sovietization of the countryside.

⁹¹ "Svodka no. 314 Pomoshnika po politichasti komanduiushchego voiskami vnutrennei sluzhby na 3 oktobra 1920 goda," Ts.G.A.O.R., Fond 130, SNK, Opis' 3, document 414(2).

⁹² Extensive passages from soldiers' letters are, for example, in the "Politsvodka 9oi armii za aprel mesits" (Political survey of the Ninth Army for April 1920), Ts.G.A.O.R., Fond 192, Opis' 1, document 137.

⁹³ "Doklady, otchety Ural'skogo Gubkoma RKP(b) i Voennogo okruga o polozhenii v gubernii" (subtitle: "osvedomitel'naia rabota"), Ts.P.A., TsKa RKP(b), Fond 17, Opis' 12, document 783, p. 41.

To extinguish the flames of the peasant war, the Bolsheviks used methods familiar everywhere: military occupation, economic concessions, and a ruthless regime of terror. We have seen that in Ukraine and Kuban, Volga and Siberia, the Bolsheviks burned villages, took hostages, executed kulaks, and so on. The most vivid illustration of suppression as a coherent policy was the experience of Tambov.

By March 1921 it was commonplace for the Bolsheviks to approach social and political problems in the countryside in terms of a military campaign. This was an easy way out. It was difficult to win free elections; it was easier to open up a new front against "bandits," kulaks, "hirelings of the bourgeoisie," or Polish agents who displayed a petit bourgeois consciousness and undermined the proletarian cause. They had to be smashed. Once "objectively" labeled counterrevolutionary, peasants had two choices: either to submit or to be exterminated. In December 1920 the commander of Internal Security troops, V. S. Kornev, proposed to Dzerzhinsky: "For the final liquidation of Antonov's bands it is necessary to flood the area of rebellion with armed force in order to saturate it with a total occupation. This is exactly what I am doing now."⁹⁴ Indeed, Tambov Province was flooded with military units. Famous Red Army commanders were summoned. Machine guns, artillery, and airplanes—everything was thrown into battle on the Tambov front. And yet achieving victory by purely military means proved impossible.

The documents available now on the Bolshevik suppression of the Tambov rebellion provide a remarkable exposé of their mentality and their attitudes to social and political problems. What is most striking about Bolshevik communications on the subject of suppression is their degree of openness about the specifics of violence they were about to unleash on the civilian population and their perfectly open realization that they were practicing terror not against some imaginary kulaks or counterrevolutionary elements but on the entire population. The most vicious and bloody stage of suppression is associated with the Plenipotentiary Commission of the All-Russian CEC for Fighting Banditry in Tambov Province, set up in February and led by Antonov-Ovseenko.

The suppression of the Tambov peasant movement was carried out according to a well-thought-out plan which involved months of preparation and execution. Antonov-Ovseenko had to face the fact that the local Bolshevik government was inept, corrupt, and demoralized. Up to a half of the local party members had quit the party. Their opponents were invisible and invincible. Antonov-Ovseenko reported on a package of measures he referred to as the occupation and sovietization plan. Its main objective was to occupy militarily large parts of Tambov Province, especially its southwestern part, the home base of the rebels, and to sovietize the countryside by force. The military commander of the operation, Tukhachevsky, defined sovietization, which "was to be enforced by the following measures: extracting bandit elements implanted in

⁹⁴ "Telegramma komanduiushchego voiskami VNUS V.S. Korneva" (22 December 1920), Ts.P.A., Fond 76, Opis' 3, document 147.

revolutionary committees, splitting up the peasantry by means of arming it against the bandits while providing it with a material interest in the shape of the property confiscated from the bandits; applying terrorist methods against bandit sympathizers [and] extracting Union of Toiling Peasantry committees."⁹⁵ Tukhachevsky's list of measures reveals the sophisticated social surgery he performed in Tambov. He openly admitted that certain sections of the population were carved out, including the SRs and peasant union sympathizers, in addition to the actual rebels.

During the months of March and April 1921 the Cheka was working full time on the first step of sovietization: preparing lists of rebels and their families. It was a difficult task, and to facilitate it a system of secret informers and surveillance was introduced in all organizations and agencies. "It was working very well," boasted Antonov-Ovseenko. In March a province congress of soviets was convened with the explicit purpose of monitoring peasants' political views. Angry peasant delegates complained in their speeches that local authorities treated peasants as serfs, abusing them and their cattle. The most articulate delegates wound up on the Cheka lists of unreliable elements. By April a list of insurgent families was drafted. It included ten thousand names. The Cheka overfulfilled the plan on the peasant front by also composing lists of suspect families.

The next task was to split the peasant community and, if possible, isolate the insurgents from the local population. To divide the community, Lenin's plenipotentiary created "special funds for rewarding particularly loyal villages and individual households."⁹⁶ In addition to buying support Antonov-Ovseenko introduced preferential treatment for villages which fulfilled at least 50 percent of their delivery target. Salt and manufactured goods were brought in to encourage peasants to cooperate with Soviet power. The attempt to divide and rule by confiscating property from some, called kulaks, and distributing to others, the "poor peasants," was practiced, as in Ukraine a few months earlier. In Tambov the strategy of Lenin's envoy was more complex. It was to induce peasants to participate in their own self-destruction.

The purpose was to generate hostility and suspicion between peasants and rebels. Toward this end Antonov-Ovseenko started what he called a campaign of village assembly resolutions against the insurgents. Essentially peasants were forced to pass a verbal verdict against the Greens in full knowledge that the insurgents would find out and that scores would have to be settled for treason. This is exactly what Lenin's plenipotentiary needed. To promote such feuds, he created so-called detachments of self-defense, that is, peasant detachments that were forced to fight the rebels if they approached the village. Most interesting is Tukhachevsky's explicit admission that sovietization included forcing peasants to compromise themselves in the eyes of the rebels and provoking their wrath

⁹⁵ "Commander of the Troops in the Tambov Province to Lenin" (16 July 1921), *Trotsky Papers*, vol. 2, document 706, p. 482.

⁹⁶ Antonov-Ovseenko, "O Banditskom dvizhenii," *ibid.*, p. 518.

for serving the Bolsheviks. This technique had been used a few months earlier in Kuban. It was a purposeful attempt not only to divide the peasant community but to provoke rebel reprisals against peasants in order to undercut the rebels' social base.

The taking of hostages had acquired grand proportions by the late spring of 1921.⁹⁷ The Bolsheviks held at least five thousand hostages in their camps. In most cases the Bolsheviks reckoned that these were wives and children of rebels, and the threat of their execution was supposed to act as a deterrent. If there was a need, for example, to protect a railroad, hostages were taken from the surrounding countryside, and it was made known that if the tracks were sabotaged, hostages would be executed. This system was widely practiced, as Antonov-Ovseenko admitted, to protect telegraph lines, bridges, and rail tracks. If it was known for sure that a family had a man hiding in the forests with the Greens, they would be taken hostage and threatened with execution within two weeks unless the rebel showed up. If he did, he was sometimes shot. If he was lucky, his family would be exiled unharmed to the north. Another effective technique used to divide the community was a campaign promising clemency to returning insurgents.⁹⁸ Six thousand believed the promises and returned to their domiciles. These people were perceived as traitors by the rebels, and reprisals against them played into the Bolsheviks' hands. As it turned out, "pardoned" rebels were not really pardoned at all but exiled as rebel sympathizers and unreliable elements rather than executed as rebels. Antonov-Ovseenko reported that the Greens' resorting to force only weakened them by isolating them from the peasant masses.

According to Tukhachevsky, these measures designed to split the peasant community worked. In July he wrote: "the peasantry has been compromised in the eyes of the bandits"⁹⁹ The Bolshevik hero of the Tambov war proudly reported to Lenin that by 11 July 1921 over twenty thousand rebels had been annihilated, the peasant union had been smashed, and Soviet power restored. Yet even after this spectacular victory on the peasant front Tukhachevsky feared that once the occupation forces were withdrawn, peasants would start their rebellion again. Hence he recommended a prolonged occupation. Needless to say, not only was Lenin fully aware that sovietization was a regime of occupation in the Russian countryside, but his recommendations to Tukhachevsky and Antonov-Ovseenko were to "press harder" and, as usual, "*raspravitsia* mercilessly." His plenipotentiaries did exactly that. The brutality of occupation is evidenced by an order signed by Tukhachevsky and Antonov-Ovseenko and published in the *Tambov Izvestiia* on 11 June 1921:

Since the first of June the struggle against banditry has reestablished order in the countryside. Soviet power systematically reestablishes the peaceful work of the peas-

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 542.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 528.

⁹⁹ "Commander of the Troops in the Tambov Province to Lenin" (16 July 1921), *ibid.*, p. 482.

ants. Thanks to the energetic actions of our troops, Antonov's band has been defeated and dispersed, and its members fall, one by one, into our hands.

In order to tear out the roots of banditry and of the movement of Socialist Revolutionaries, the commission has decided to supplement the existing regulations with the following clauses:

- 1) All citizens who refuse to identify themselves are to be shot on the spot.
- 2) In villages which hide weapons, the Political Commission of the district or of the region is to *take hostages* who are to be *executed* if the weapons are not surrendered.
- 3) In cases when hidden weapons are found, the order has been given *to shoot on the spot and without trial the oldest member of the family present*.
- 4) The family in whose house a bandit is hiding is to be arrested and *exiled from the province, and the oldest in the family is to be shot on the spot without trial*.
- 5) Families which provide sanctuary to family members of the bandits or who hide the property of the latter are to be considered themselves as families of bandits, and *the oldest working member of such a family is to be shot on the spot without trial*.
- 6) If the family of a bandit succeeds in fleeing, *its property is to be distributed to the peasants who remain loyal to Soviet power, and the abandoned houses are to be burned*.
- 7) This order is to be implemented sternly and mercilessly. It is to be read at village assemblies.¹⁰⁰

These were not mere threats. In a detailed résumé Antonov-Ovseenko reported to Lenin that during the last week of June 16,000 "deserter-bandits" were apprehended and 1,500 bandit families extracted; 3,430 hostages and 913 hostage families were taken.¹⁰¹ The psychological effect of these measures was enormous. Antonov-Ovseenko wrote to Lenin that peasants were finally acquiring a consciousness of the futility of struggling against Soviet power, because the Bolsheviks would shoot as many people as necessary until all resistance was crushed. This remarkable frankness suggests that inculcating a slave mentality and blind obedience based on merciless shooting was an objective Lenin's envoy shared with Lenin.

The final stage of the operation was the deportation of "hostile social elements." Thirty thousand rebels and about 50,000 "bandit" families, that is, women and children, were evicted from their homes and deported, according to an SR report from Tambov. Moreover the total number of deportees from an area including surrounding rebel provinces was over 100,000.¹⁰² In the neighboring Volga provinces it was famine that broke the back of the peasant resistance movement. Millions died of starvation and disease. A Western scholar

¹⁰⁰ The text of the order was published in "Le Mouvement Insurrectionnel," *Pour la Russie*, no. 92 (18 August 1921), 2.

¹⁰¹ Antonov-Ovseenko, "O Banditskom dvizhenii," *Trotsky Papers*, vol. 2, p. 542.

¹⁰² "Le Mouvement Insurrectionnel," *Pour la Russie*, no. 92 (18 August 1921), 2.

wrote in 1922: "Russian agriculture has been led to a catastrophe. Terrible famine embraces an area with a population of 40 million people, that is, a third of the total population of Soviet Russia. This famine is primarily the result of that unfortunate and destructive policy."¹⁰³ It was a grand rehearsal for a much larger operation of deportation and starvation which would run into hundreds of thousands, indeed millions, ten years later.

¹⁰³ Olberg, *Die Bauernrevolution in Russland*, p. 63.

Epilogue

Regime in Crisis, 1921

AS THE Bolsheviks were fighting peasant rebels in Ukraine and in Don, Kuban, and Siberia in February 1921, the Communist regime was to suffer one more blow, which finally forced it to sound a retreat on the internal front. The upheaval of February–March 1921 is usually presented as a mutiny of sailors at the Kronstadt naval base near Petrograd.¹ Some add that there also were strikes in Petrograd and Moscow.² These were not isolated incidents of workers' and sailors' discontent. Neither were these the last salvos of the Bolsheviks' civil war with the counterrevolutionaries. The mutiny in Kronstadt must be seen in the context of other mutinies in the armed forces from the end of 1920 to early 1921. And the strikes in Petrograd and Moscow were a part of a powerful strike wave that swept across major industrial cities of Russia and Ukraine. These were not isolated incidents but a popular upheaval that coincided with growing peasant insurgency—a popular upheaval that was much more dangerous for the Bolsheviks than the Whites ever were. It was a crisis of the entire social, political, and economic order of Communism. To put it in a Leninist vocabulary, Russia was in a revolutionary situation. The lower classes refused to live under the conditions they faced, and the government was unable to govern the way it used to.

The immediate cause of the strikes in Petrograd and Moscow was a drastic deterioration of food supplies. The Bolsheviks had to reduce bread rations for the starving workers. The Special Commission of Labor and Defense resolved: "In Moscow, Petrograd, and the Ivanovo-Voznesensk region and in Kronstadt, to reduce bread rations temporarily from 22 January to 1 February, i.e., for ten days, by one-third of the former quantity, i.e., to make two days rations last three days."³ The reduced grain supply was in turn a direct consequence of the Bolsheviks' war on peasants in all major grain-producing areas of Russia and Ukraine. This offensive was no longer connected to the civil war against the Whites. The Whites had been finished by that date, and that is why the Bolshevik war on peasant rebels was intensified. During the winter of 1920–21 the Bolsheviks seriously tried to implement the system of economic organization later called War Communism. The party mobilized the masses, and scores of bureaucracies tried to run the economy as a war machine. Money lost any

¹ Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution*, pp. 86–87.

² McAuley, *Bread and Justice*, pp. 398–411.

³ Records, dispatch 861.911.144 (Riga, 3 February 1921).

value. Millions of people served as soldiers or worker-soldiers in labor armies. On 13 January the American consul in Vyborg reported: "The Petrograd *Pravda* of 26 December published an order of the Petrograd Soviet discontinuing the work at all Petrograd plants to January 10, 1921. The explanation given is that work has to be stopped owing to several holidays in January, but at the same time about 12,000 workmen will be sent to various suburban districts outside of Petrograd for the purpose of cutting firewood."⁴ Workers were mobilized to chop wood, peasants were mobilized to cart grain. And yet the more the Bolsheviks perfected their command administrative system, the more they mobilized the masses, and the more bureaucracies they set up, the less the system seemed to produce. In fact the economy virtually came to a halt in February 1921. Nothing worked. Railroads barely functioned. Food supplies were running out. For the lack of raw materials most factories had to be shut down. The population was abandoning the cities. The Bolshevik leaders were very well informed about the political attitudes of workers and sailors. In a classified report to Dzerzhinsky, Feldman, the chief of the First Special Department of the Cheka, wrote:

The discontent of the masses in the Baltic Fleet has been exacerbated by letters from home. Almost all of them contain complaints about difficulties of life and injustices willingly or unwillingly perpetrated by local authorities. Considering that this [is] one of the main causes of discontent and not only among Baltic Sea sailors but in the armed forces generally, it is imperative to pay close attention to this.

All party members and nonparty sailors unanimously refer to depressing news from home. Here they took away the last horse, there an old man, a [sailor's] father, was imprisoned. In another case they confiscated the entire crop, and in another took away the last cow, and in another the requisition detachment took away personal belongings and clothes, and the examples go on and on.⁵

No doubt institutionalized robbery, coercion, and violence against the sailors' families could not but trigger protest. Yet the underlying causes were more profound. News from home was not the cause but a catalyst of the sailors' rebellion. An important psychological shift in public opinion occurred in the winter of 1920–21. During the civil war with the Whites the workers and peasants were asked to endure hardships until the end of the war. Someone else was always to blame for the temporary difficulties: the Whites, the Allies, or the Mensheviks and the SRs. Now the Whites were finished, the Allies gone, and still there was no bread. People were tired of being fed with promises. The mood in workers' neighborhoods in Moscow and Petrograd was reminiscent of October 1917: enough promises and enough waiting. Workers demanded at nu-

⁴ Enclosure in dispatch of 23 January from Helsinfors [Helsinki], Records, dispatch 861.911.133.

⁵ "Doklad Nachal'nika Pervogo Spets. Otdela Feldmana," Ts.P.A., Dzerzhinsky Archive, Fond 76, Opis' 3, document 167.

merous rallies decent food rations, new elections, and fair treatment. The gloomy passivity of the preceding months gave way to an outburst of frustration and political action. As a result, as one historian put it: "sporadic disturbances developed into a general assault on the War Communist system."⁶ Almost simultaneously in Moscow and Petrograd on 22–23 February spontaneous workers' demonstrations took place which set off the chain of events that led to the Kronstadt rebellion.

In Moscow strikes were provoked by a reduction of food rations. The striking printers marched to a rubber factory in Khamovniki District and persuaded workers there to join them. Then they marched to the Red Army barracks intending to attract soldiers as well. The Communists in the barracks locked the soldiers inside and opened fire on the workers. Some were killed and wounded. They rushed to other districts of Moscow calling Bolsheviks "murderers" and inciting other workers to join them in protests and marches.⁷ The Petrograd Cheka reported to the central Cheka that in the first two weeks of February 1921 "strikes took place at many factories and plants. At the Arsenal plant workers gave speeches echoing the Mensheviks."⁸ The Cheka was alarmed at the appearance of rumors forecasting the "approaching end of Soviet rule." As a preventive measure the Petrograd Cheka arrested 266 persons.⁹

Despite early warnings of the coming earthquake, the events in Moscow and Petrograd caught all political parties by surprise. As happened so many times before during the Russian revolution, the hungry masses, not political leaders, were the makers of events. Troubles in Petrograd also started on 22 February. Numerous rallies were held at various factories and plants. Workers protested the reduction in food rations. Bolsheviks' attempts to calm the workers only ignited stormier protests. They were shouted at and thrown out of factories. The resolutions passed at these rallies were overwhelmingly those sponsored by the Mensheviks and SRs. Those called for convocation of the Constituent Assembly, free elections, an end to the Bolshevik dictatorship and the Cheka, and freedom of trade.¹⁰ On 23 and 24 February the Baltic shipbuilding plant and the Tube plant joined the strike. The soldiers of the Izmailovsky and Finliandsky regiments at their meetings passed resolutions in support of workers' demands. The American consul in Vyborg described the beginning of unrest in his dispatch to the State Department:

In Petrograd, the unrest began on 24 February at 11 AM when Trubochnyi plant workmen in Vasilievsky island stopped work and with their wives and children

⁶ Sakwa, *Soviet Communists in Power*, p. 241.

⁷ "Po Rossii. Rabochie volneniia v Moskve," *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 5 (April 1921), p. 23.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ "V Sekretnyi Otdel Vecheka. Dvukhnedel'naia Informatsionnaia svodka Petrogradskoi Cheka," Ts.P.A., Dzerzhinsky Archive, Fond 76, Opis' 3, document 167.

¹⁰ "Les Événements de Petrograd," *Pour la Russie*, no. 56 (16 March 1921).

marched to Laferm tobacco factory. They raised placards "Down with Communism" and called for free trade. In spite of obstructions caused by the detachments of military students, the Laferm and Baltic [plant] workmen joined the strikers as well as a number of Red soldiers quartered in barracks of so-called Finland regiment. The success of uprising depended on steps taken by Baltic NAVY sailors. Bolsheviks did all possible to keep them from uniting with mutinous workmen. At first sailors of Poltava and Gangut passed an "awaiting resolution" but later they with other sailors disregarded orders of their commissaries and even disposed of some of the latter. They then tried to communicate with and assist the workmen. In the meantime, commissary Antzelowitch tried to speak to Baltic [plant] workmen but was forcibly evicted from his motor car. Kalinin, who is a peasant, had more success and mob listened but refused to disperse. Workmen only went to their factories and succeeded in having others join them. At this moment, large patrols appeared consisting of military students and trustworthy Communists. All meetings were dispersed but not without bloodshed. An extra session of Petrograd Soviet was called. The city was declared under martial law.¹¹

On 25 February several clashes between strikers and cadets of the Red officers' schools took place. A Cheka report stated that workers disarmed the soldiers of one platoon. Attempts were made to attract the Petrograd garrison to the side of the strikers. The workers, continued the report, put forward political demands to convene the Constituent Assembly and hold new elections to the city soviet. "The situation is alarming. They would not let Bolsheviks speak. They demand abolition of special departments of the Cheka and freedom of trade."¹² According to the results of an investigation, concluded the Petrograd Cheka, the Mensheviks played a prominent role in these events.

The report of the SRs to their own Central Committee contained more details on the clashes in Petrograd.

On 24 February at 3 PM two companies of Communist troops were marching along the Nevsky Prospect. Workers from various factories and plants, assembled there, began shouting "Down with the Soviets." The soldiers responded with several salvos in the air. After that the workers' crowds rushed to the soldiers and began disarming them. Some of the soldiers dropped their weapons and joined the workers. They all moved to Vasilievsky Island. On the following day by the evening the population of Vasilievsky Island recognized the authority of the insurgents, who had informed the Baltic Sea Fleet of their action.¹³

During these clashes 4 workers from the Obukhov plant and 8 from Putilov were killed; 18 other workers were wounded. According to the SR source, the Petrograd Cheka arrested 350 workers at the Putilov plant and 185 at Obukhov;

¹¹ Vyborg, Finland (3 March 1921), Records, dispatch 861.00.8242.

¹² "Razgovor po priamomu provodu s Petrogradom," Ts.P.A., Dzerzhinsky Archive, Fond 76, Opis' 3, document 167.

¹³ "Svedeniia o sobytiakh v Petrograde" (handwritten), PSR Archive, document 2047.

the total reached about 1,000 workers from various plants. Several thousand soldiers were reported as having abandoned their units and joined the strikers. To anyone who had lived through the events of February 1917, this chain of events appeared strikingly similar. It looked as if a popular insurrection had begun. As in 1918, workers from various plants elected delegates to the Petrograd Assembly of Plenipotentiaries, which defined its tasks in a declaration: "We, the representatives of plants and Socialist parties in Petrograd, despite much that we disagree on, have united on the basis of the following goals: Overthrow of the Bolshevik dictatorship, free elections to the soviets, freedom of speech, press, and assembly for all; and release of political prisoners. To achieve these objectives we call on all to launch a general political strike."¹⁴

The Petrograd Bolsheviks were clearly frightened by these developments. They could not easily hide the fact that what they had on their hands was a workers' and soldiers', not a White Guards', movement. Whatever their propaganda lines later were, their appeals to the workers on 26 February leave no doubt on that score. The appeal made by Zinoviev betrayed a sense of panic and a desperate attempt to buy time with concessions. Soviet power had already bought, he claimed, 18 million pud of grain abroad, paying for it in gold. The Petrograd soviet had already ordered that anti-profiteering detachments be removed from rail stations. The soviet had already ordered that additional trains to the countryside be put into service. The difficulties were temporary. Things would be better. Not a word was said about free elections or Cheka arrests.¹⁵ If Zinoviev's appeal was full of promises, the one by the Red cadets sounded like a threat: "Yesterday [24 February] we did not shoot with combat bullets. But we are telling you openly, push aside those scoundrels who urge you to strike, or else we will not be able to distinguish between those innocent and guilty. . . . To our enemies we have only one kind of answer, regardless of whether they are at the front or in the rear."¹⁶ The Petrograd Cheka and Zinoviev tried to present popular unrest to the outside world and to Moscow as the work of agitators and conspirators. Their discourse, however, leaves no doubt that the authorities addressed the Petrograd workers as a whole. The problem with the Communists' handling of the crisis was that they combined economic concessions with intensified repression. Their strategy apparently was to placate the mass of hungry workers and isolate them from those expressing political demands. The immediate effect of this policy was to radicalize the protest movement even further.

In the meantime the Bolsheviks began pulling available military forces to Petrograd. Their problem was that they could not quite be certain that the troops were reliable. For example on 25 February authorities in Novgorod, a city between Petrograd and Moscow, received an order to dispatch three regi-

¹⁴ American consulate, Vyborg, enclosure in Records, dispatch 861.911.167.

¹⁵ "Ko vsem truzhenikam i truzhenitsam Petrograda," *ibid*.

¹⁶ "Ot krasnykh kursantov Rabochim i rabotnitsam Petrograda" (25 February 1921), *ibid*.

ments stationed there to Petrograd. This was not an easy order to fulfill, because the day before Novgorod garrison soldiers had held stormy rallies protesting grain requisitioning. Soldiers who spoke at the rallies accused a Communist commissar, Epifanov, of selling soldiers' supplies on the black market. Cheka chairman Zalkind disbanded the rallies and arrested forty-five soldiers and twelve Red Army officers. The next day soldiers of one of the three regiments ordered to move to Petrograd refused. They stopped the train between stations and killed the commissars, and over seven hundred deserted with their weapons.¹⁷ Local peasant partisans damaged the rail tracks in several places to make movement of troops to Petrograd more difficult. But this was only the beginning. Much more ominous developments were to follow.

On 27 and 28 February the crews of several big ships of the Baltic Fleet took the side of the workers by supporting their political demands. The American consul in Vyborg described the situation in the city on 27 February:

The extra food ration mentioned in my telegram [no. 275 on 3 March, 6 P.M.] was gradually delivered to win over the mutinous workmen. It consisted of one pound of meat and one and a quarter pound of bread which made quite a hole in Petrograd's dwindling food supply. 3000 sailors at naval school rooms passed resolutions principally calling for Constituent Assembly, free trade and traveling privileges. On 27 February streets were comparatively quiet due to the patrols and repressive measures, but only a small percentage of factories were in operation. Some of the workers returned to their posts but did nothing and conferences continued. A message was sent from Kronstadt office to send delegates to factories to discuss further action. The naval commissaries and Kalinin did all possible for the next day or two to prevent cooperation between Kronstadt and workmen.¹⁸

The worst-case scenario for the Bolsheviks would be for the sailors to join the strikers in Petrograd. In such a case the insurgents would have a preponderance of military force on their side. This is exactly what happened on 28 February. At 11:00 P.M. Zinoviev sent a panicky telegram to Lenin. "Kronstadt: The two biggest ships, *Sevastopol'* and *Petropavlovsk*, have adopted SR/Black Hundreds' resolutions and presented an ultimatum to be answered in 24 hours. Among the workers in Petrograd the disposition is as before unsteady. Large plants do not work. We expect that the SRs are going to speed up events."¹⁹

The Kronstadt sailors' rebellion started with an act of defiance by these two ships' crews against Bolshevik authorities. It was the next stage in the escalation of popular unrest in Petrograd. The resolution which Zinoviev characterized as "Black Hundred" in fact demanded free elections, free trade, the release of

¹⁷ "Brozhenie sredi soldat," *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 5 (April 1921), 30.0

¹⁸ Vyborg, Finland (4 March 1921), Records, dispatch 861.00.8241.

¹⁹ Zinoviev to Lenin (28 February 1921), Ts.P.A., Dzerzhinsky Archive, Fond 76, Opis' 3, document 167.

political prisoners, and equal food rations for all.²⁰ It merely reiterated long-standing workers' demands. Communications between Lenin, Dzerzhinsky, and Zinoviev leave no doubt that they all knew very well that they were dealing with a popular insurrection of workers and sailors, not Black Hundreds or counterrevolutionaries. Yet Lenin and Dzerzhinsky immediately decided to present the actions of Kronstadt sailors to the outside world as a White Guards' conspiracy of General A. R. Kozlovsky. By February 1921 this became an automatic Bolshevik reaction to popular discontent. Lenin demanded that the head of the Cheka report to him on the situation in Petrograd and Kronstadt every four hours. Only ten copies of these reports were made. Eight of them were for the heads of various Cheka departments, one was marked for the archive, and one sent to Lenin. This suggests that not even all members of the Politburo were informed of the developments in Kronstadt. The Bolshevik strategy was to prevent any news from Kronstadt from reaching other cities; to present the events there as another White Guards' conspiracy; to prevent Kronstadt sailors and Petrograd workers from taking over the city; and after that to suppress the uprising by superior military force.

It was a pragmatic plan, but in the early days of March, when a Revolutionary Committee was formed in Kronstadt and when military might was on the side of the insurgents, it was far from clear whether the Communists were going to be in a position to hold Petrograd, let alone conquer Kronstadt. The workers were on strike, the garrison was unreliable, and there were only ten thousand Communists in the city. Zinoviev panicked and was ready to abandon Petrograd. Only bad news was coming to Lenin every four hours in those hectic first days of March. More ships' crews followed the example of the the first two. Communists were thrown out of a general meeting in Kronstadt on 1 March. A Revolutionary Committee of rebel sailors was formed in Kronstadt on 2 March. Communists and commissars were arrested. Without a shot being fired, the Kronstadt naval military base with the entire Baltic Fleet of Russia was lost to the Communists. The Kronstadt Revolutionary Committee sent its representatives to Petrograd in an attempt to win over the entire Petrograd garrison to its side, without firing a shot. The Communists were in real danger of losing Petrograd, and the political effect of that loss on the rest of Russia would be enormous. Lenin urged Dzerzhinsky to hold Petrograd at whatever cost. On 3 March the American consul in Vyborg described the situation in Petrograd:

Our courier arrived here today at 12 noon. He brought a complete review of the recent events in Petrograd up to 2 March. Soviet authorities by the extreme measures have suppressed a part of the uprising and mutinies, but still the workmen, sailors, and counterrevolutionaries manage to congregate in other places. Shots were still

²⁰ The entire text of the resolution is in Getzler, *Kronstadt, 1917–1921*, p. 214.

being fired and arrests being made as of 10 P.M. 2 March, and therefore the Soviet administration does not completely control the situation.²¹

Contrary to a widespread belief that the Kronstadt sailors never even tried to coordinate action with workers, Cheka documents suggest the opposite. On 6 March the Petrograd Cheka reported to Zinoviev: "As of now we do not expect an opening of hostilities by the [Kronstadt] rebels. They are expecting an uprising of workers and the rest of the population in Petrograd, where they are sending their people for the preparation of an uprising which is expected on 6 or 7 March."²² It was not a matter of a few troublemakers. Entire plants were by now hotbeds of anti-Bolshevik revolutionary activity. Support the Kronstadt Sailors! Join the Kronstadt Sailors! These became the most popular slogans of the day in Petrograd. On 8 March the Petrograd Cheka reported to Zinoviev: "The [Kronstadt] Revolutionary Committee is expecting an uprising in Petrograd, where to it is sending its own people. . . . At a rally of workers of the Arsenal plant a resolution was passed to join the Kronstadt uprising [*prisoedinit'sia k vosstaniuu*]. The general meeting has elected a delegation to maintain contact with Kronstadt. The composition of the delegation is one Menshevik, one SR, and one anarchist."²³ The Cheka report added that the said delegation had already been arrested. It seems that the Cheka did not dare at that stage to attack entire plants. Instead it concentrated its efforts on the leaders and on disrupting communication: all delegates to other enterprises, all Mensheviks and SRs who could be found, all speakers at rallies were being arrested day after day. The Cheka reports cast doubt on the view that Petrograd workers explicitly eschewed political action or that their protest was limited to economic demands only. The workers, just as the sailors, defied Bolshevik authorities, and they were willing to join the sailors in overthrowing the Bolsheviks. The only difference between them and the sailors was that the sailors had heavy artillery and the workers did not. They were essentially defenseless vis-à-vis the Cheka. And on 7 March the Cheka reported that it was launching "decisive actions against the workers."²⁴

A massive purge of Petrograd factories and plants began. Interrogations of individual workers, lists of speakers at rallies, forced confessions, threats of execution—all these means were used to identify anyone who had shown anti-Soviet feelings. Observers reported that the Communists virtually terrorized the worker population into submission.²⁵ The key here is that the Communists suppressed the workers' uprising in Petrograd in the first days of March.²⁶ The

²¹ Vyborg, Finland, Records, dispatch 861.00.8243.

²² "Agenturnaia svodka Zinovievu" (6 March 1921), Ts.P.A., Dzerzhinsky Archive, Fond 76, Opis' 3, document 167.

²³ "Operativno-informatsionnaia svodka Cheka" (8 March 1921), *ibid.*

²⁴ "Operativnaia svodka Gubcheka" (7 March 1921), *ibid.*

²⁵ Quarton, Vyborg, Finland (12 March 1921), Records, dispatch 861.00.8319.

²⁶ Siegelbaum, *Soviet State and Society between Revolutions*, p. 77.

sailors' uprising in Kronstadt, which was an outgrowth of the uprising in Petrograd, was now cut off from its larger social base and localized on a small island. From this moment on the Kronstadt sailors were on the defensive. It was only a matter of time and casualties before they would be overrun.

The content and political message of popular appeals in Petrograd and Kronstadt changed considerably in the course of only two weeks. If, in the last days of February, workers' resolutions sounded like lists of grievances focusing primarily on economic hardships, two weeks later they expressed an outright rejection of Communist rule and Soviet power as such. In a leaflet printed clandestinely despite arrests, the Petrograd Assembly of Plenipotentiaries appealed to the population:

You all have read appeals and orders of the government. You all understood their meaning. They respond with guns to the lawful demands of the people. Guns are thundering over Petrograd. It is inadmissible to wait any longer. It is time to act. The People themselves must decide their fate. They themselves must overthrow the yoke of Bolshevism. Everyone without exception must take part in this struggle. The Workers have already risen. The villages are in flames. Kronstadt rose in rebellion to support Petrograd workers. Now Petrograd workers must rise to support Kronstadt sailors.²⁷

The revolutionary press in Kronstadt echoed similar themes. The Bolsheviks were referred to as a party that had usurped power, "by methods of force, murder, treason, and vengeance on the families of those who had risen in revolt." The Bolsheviks had promised liberty and given workers Cheka terror instead. They had talked about a worker-peasant alliance but robbed the countryside. The editorial continued: "But the moral yoke of Communism is even more criminal. They have enchained the whole spiritual life of the laborers, forcing them to think like them. Now the people are convinced that they have betrayed the principles of socialism, and they will put an end to this tyranny. Here in Kronstadt we are laying the cornerstone of the third revolution, opening up a vista of true socialist reconstruction."²⁸

These documents of free political expression, rare under the Bolshevik dictatorship, are an important source for understanding popular attitudes in 1921. The Petrograd plenipotentiaries did not know what the Kronstadt newspapers were writing. Yet the main themes of their appeals were the same. And similar attitudes surfaced not only in Kronstadt and Petrograd but in Moscow, Kharkov, Tula, Saratov, and almost all other industrial centers of Russia and Ukraine. Bolshevik rule was discredited and detested everywhere. Petrograd and Kronstadt were not an exception but a symptom of a general crisis of the Communist

²⁷ "Ko Vsem" (11 March 1921), Portuguese Archive.

²⁸ "Za Chto My Boremsia," *Izvestiia Vremennogo Revoliutsionnogo Komiteta* (8 March 1921), in Helsinki [Helsinki] (19 March 1921), Records, dispatch 861.911.96.

order. A survey of provincial Cheka reports on the situation in their provinces leaves one with no other conclusion.

Kostroma: The disposition of workers is such that strikes may ignite any moment now. We have arrested the leaders of the Mensheviks and SRs. With the coming of spring we expect a worsening of the situation in terms of a rise of banditry and desertion.²⁹

Workers struck, soldiers deserted, and peasants formed bands and attacked the Communists—this was the pattern in most if not all provinces of Russia in February 1921.

Bryansk: New action by Bryansk and Mal'tsevsky workers is expected. The Cheka has begun arrests of the Mensheviks and SRs.³⁰

Gomel: The Cheka informs that beginning with 22 January and caused by a number of crises, banditry is on the rise. A counterrevolutionary movement among the soldiers and workers is noticeable.³¹

Following the example of Petrograd, workers in some cities set up assemblies of plenipotentiaries. In Saratov, for example, such a council grew out of a strike coordination committee. If and when soldiers' representatives from the local garrisons joined those assemblies, the Bolsheviks had a serious crisis on their hands. Any move against workers' representatives would then trigger a soldiers' mutiny or an insurrection, as in Kronstadt. The Cheka reported:

Saratov: The Control Commission elected by the workers is rather active. It demands the inclusion of the representatives of the garrison. The workers' disposition is agitated. The commission is in fact nothing but a strike committee. The situation at the factories is agitated. One can expect work stoppage any moment now.³²

The situation in Saratov was particularly grave, since large forces of peasant rebels were operating all over the province. The political demands of workers and soldiers in Saratov echoed those in Kronstadt, even though they had no knowledge of that. They demanded free elections to the soviets, convocation of the Constituent Assembly, freedom for all political parties, and the release of political prisoners. In Tula a general meeting of workers at the two huge plants went further. Their resolution demanded formation of a multiparty coalition government and freedom of trade.³³ From Kharkov an SR worker reported that they had "their own little Kronstadt," as he put it, at the end of February. At the

²⁹ "Operativno-informatsionnaia svodka sekretno-operativnogo upravleniia Vecheka" (7 March 1921), Ts.P.A., Dzerzhinsky Archive, Fond 76, Opis' 3, document 167.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Telegramma, M. CheKa, *Informatsionnaia svodka*, no. 6, *ibid.*

³² "Operativno-informatsionnaia svodka sekretno-operativnogo upravleniia Vecheka" (7 March 1921), *ibid.*

³³ "Tula," PSR Archive, document 2047.

workers' conference one after another Menshevik/SR resolutions were passed. Speakers condemned the "enservment of the working class," the Bolsheviks' robbery of the countryside, and the privileges of the Communists. They demanded free trade and free elections.³⁴ Similar demands were presented in many other cities.

Three factors distinguished the popular upheavals of February–March 1921 from the preceding ones. (1) Urban unrest erupted simultaneously in all major industrial centers of Russia and Ukraine. Workers, soldiers, and sailors—all put forward explicitly political demands. (2) For the first time since the spring of 1919 workers coordinated their political activity with soldiers and/or sailors. This meant in practice that the Communist authorities could not easily deploy armed force against the strikers, because they could not be sure that that would not provoke a mutiny. (3) Workers and soldier/sailors' unrest erupted at a time when peasant insurgency had reached its highest point up to that date. Tens of thousands Green rebels fought in Tambov, Kuban, Don, the lower Volga, the Urals, and Siberia. Communist rule was challenged simultaneously by peasants, cossacks, Ukrainians, workers, and sailors. The Bolsheviks had managed to antagonize just about all groups of the population. They could not sustain a protracted war on an internal front of such dimensions for long. The reliable forces the Bolsheviks had were spread very thin. Indeed the country was ungovernable in February–March 1921. The government was forced to grant concessions; Lenin called them a retreat in the Communist offensive. Market relations in trade and agriculture were going to be restored. This was the essence of the so-called New Economic Policy introduced in March 1921.

The Bolsheviks' initial reaction to popular upheaval, however, was not reform but intransigent persistence. Provincial authorities seemed to be trying to show to Moscow their resolve to restore Communist control, whatever the cost. In Simbirsk local Communists reported to Moscow measures they had undertaken: "Merciless struggle against all the opponents of Soviet power; imposition of militarized order at the cartridge plant; repressions in regard to those who broke the normal rhythm of work; intensification in the process of extracting surplus foodstuffs from the population, grain, animal fodder, etc., according to the target distribution system."³⁵ In other words War Communism as usual; the measures these authorities adopted were exactly the ones that had caused popular discontent to begin with.

In the meantime the Bolsheviks made preparations for a final assault on Kronstadt. Since the Gulf of Finland was still covered with ice, the sailors could not use the only advantage they had; they could not deploy big ships. Sure enough, they used the ships' guns to pound Communist positions on shore but

³⁴ "Na Ukraine," handwritten (Kharkov, July 1921), PSR Archive, document 2047.

³⁵ "Kratkii otchet predsedatel'ia Gub. Ispolkoma o vvedenii voennogo polozheniia v Simbirskoi gubernii," Ts.G.A.O.R., Fond 1235, VTsIK, Opis' 99, document 10, pp. 1–2.

were unable to undertake an offensive operation. The Communist leaders summoned Tukhachevsky to command operations against the fortress at Kronstadt—a huge complex of forts. Tukhachevsky informed Dzerzhinsky that his plan was to direct concentrated artillery fire on one fort at a time until it was totally destroyed, then direct all firepower on the next fort, and so on until the entire fortress was destroyed so that a ground offensive could commence. For two weeks the Communist artillery pounded Kronstadt, followed by bloody assaults on ice across the Gulf of Finland. Thousands died in fierce fighting. Several assaults were repulsed. In the end the fortress fell. Thousands of sailors were captured and executed by the Cheka. A new wave of Red Terror rolled across the entire country.

The party line was unambiguous: forcibly remove any organized political opposition. The more dangerous the local Bolsheviks judged the situation to be, the harder they hit the opposition parties. The members of these parties were simply extracted from the community one by one. The decision by the Communist party leaders to wipe out whatever was left of the opposition parties was made in direct response to the unprecedented popular upheaval of February–March 1921. On 28 February 1921 the All-Russian Cheka sent an order to all provincial Chekas:

The All-Russian Cheka orders smashed to pieces the apparatus of the anti-Soviet political parties. For this purpose in the towns and villages where strikes are going on [provincial Chekas are] to implement the following:

1. Extract all intelligentsia, anarchists, SRs, Mensheviks, particularly those working in the land departments and food supply agencies.
2. After that start the extraction of active Mensheviks and SRs and anarchists working at the plants and calling for strikes and demonstrations.

Deputy Chairman of the All-Russian Cheka: [I. K.] Ksenofontov.³⁶

In the wake of the popular upheavals early in 1921 the total number of socialists of all parties in Lenin's concentration camps was estimated in the tens of thousands.³⁷ The individual role of these people did not matter. Here we have the ingredients of a Stalinist approach to political activity. Entire groups of the population deemed hostile were going to be extracted. In 1922, in connection with the show trial of the SR party, a hunt for anyone who had ever been a member of the SR party at any time was launched. Tens of thousands were arrested and imprisoned without any trial in the camps in the north. Some of their letters and appeals reached the West.³⁸

Lenin called the introduction of market relations in trade and agriculture a

³⁶ 28 February 1921, Prikaz Vecheka, Ts.P.A., Dzerzhinsky Archive, Fond 76, Opis' 3, document 167.

³⁷ PSR Archive, document 2030.

³⁸ See, for example, "An Appeal to the International Proletariat from a Prison in Tobolsk," in Brovkin, ed., *Dear Comrades*, pp. 237–52.

retreat from the construction of socialism, but there was going to be no retreat in politics. The NEP order was certainly not a liberalization of the Bolshevik regime, nor was it a search for a tolerant path to socialism. All opposition party members, whether they were active or not, were going to be removed to the camps. No oppositional activity of any kind would be tolerated. Within a few years factions of critics were going to be weeded out from the Communist party itself. Retreat would be replaced by a new offensive on the peasant front. Hundreds of thousands were going to be deported. And new purges of oppositionists, real and imaginary, would unfold, engulfing what was left of the Communist party in a frenzied self-destruction by 1937. It is highly naive to believe that a “bad” Stalin departed from the path of a “good” Lenin. The tragedies of the 1930s were merely a continuation on a grand scale of the war on the internal front which was started by Lenin.

Conclusion

Identity, Allegiance, and Participation in the Russian Civil War

How DO WE rationally explain the behavior of people in a civil war? Some join the fighting of their own free will, others fulfill orders from the state. Still others refuse to fight but are drawn into the war defending themselves from the state's coercion. In the Russian civil war many diverse social movements, political parties, and state authorities fought for a variety of reasons. Some motivations had nothing in common with the others. For the Bolsheviks it was a class war for a new social order, for the Whites it was a war to restore the old order, for the Greens it was a war against participation in the civil war, and for Ukrainians it was a war of national liberation. The key to understanding the civil war as a whole is that there were many different conflicts unfolding at the same time. The motivations of the Reds, Whites, Greens, cossacks, Ukrainians, or Socialist Revolutionaries were rooted in their identity. National, regional, and local identity competed with that based on class or ideology. A heterogeneous and premodern society clashed with the power of a new dynamic state, guided by the goal of destroying all old identities and creating a new identity for all—that was the essence of the Russian civil war.

Chronology of the Civil War

Most historians accept the official Soviet chronology of the civil war: it started in June 1918 with the SR rebellion on the Volga and ended with the defeat of General Wrangel in November 1920. This skewed chronology makes the front line fighting synonymous with the civil war. It was invented by Soviet official historiography to cover up the much more important and long-lasting civil war between the Bolsheviks and the peasants.¹ Official chronology does not account for the fact that after General Wrangel evacuated to Istanbul in November 1920, the most devastating stage of the civil war with peasant rebels was just beginning.

The real chronology of the Russian civil war can be viewed as having three major stages. Nineteen eighteen was the year of disintegration. The empire fell apart. It was a period of local and regional sovereignty and the rise of Kaluga-type republics. Only with great approximation can one speak of a Bolshevik

¹ Vasilii Seliunin reopened the debate on the role of the Greens in Russia in his remarkable article, "Istoki," *Novyi Mir*, no. 5 (1988), 162–80.

government in 1918. It did not really control much territory. Yet it put out a claim to govern all of Russia after it disbanded the Constituent Assembly. The Bolsheviks' main opponents in 1918 were not the Whites or the Greens but the socialists. The Mensheviks and SRs challenged Bolshevik authority first in elections to the soviets and then in an uprising on the Volga under the banner of the Constituent Assembly. It was only after the Bolsheviks disbanded the newly elected soviets in addition to the Constituent Assembly that the SRs decided to fight back. The Bolsheviks had lost at the ballot box but won on the battlefield on the Volga.² The SR-led venture to restore the Constituent Assembly failed.

The frontline civil war of 1918 was a war of ephemeral governments whose claim to govern was on paper only. In the critical days of August 1918, when the SRs and the Czeches took Kazan, the Bolsheviks could not muster more than a 20,000-strong Red Army. The SRs' People's Army was only 30,000 strong. At that stage the peasants, having divided up the land, ignored the political struggles of parties and governments. The Bolsheviks' establishment of committees of the poor, however, generated the first outbursts of peasant resistance. From that point onward there existed a direct correlation between Bolshevik attempts to control the countryside and peasant resistance. The harder the Bolsheviks tried to impose "Communist relations" in the countryside, the harder the peasants fought back.

Nineteen nineteen was the year of the Whites. In 1918 they had only a few regiments wandering in the mountains. They were not yet a contender for national power. To explain how it was possible for a 10,000-strong White army of Denikin to occupy a territory populated by 50 million people in six months, one must look beyond the front line, at social and political currents on Bolshevik territory. The Whites managed to do as well as they did because they benefited from peasant uprisings on Bolshevik-held territory. Nestor Makhno did not want to aid the Whites, but his actions against the Bolsheviks did contribute to the Whites' breakthrough. The Don cossacks rebelled against the Communists and cleared the way for Denikin's advance.³ And the peasants in the Volga-Urals basin rebelled against the Bolsheviks, involuntarily aiding the offensive of Admiral Kolchak.

In the fall of 1919 the situation was reversed. Peasant rebellions on White-held territory cleared the way for the Reds. The victories of the Whites were made possible by the internal troubles of the Reds, and the victories of the Reds were in fact made possible by the internal troubles of the Whites. Oliver Radkey has suggested that the peasants, at least in Tambov Province, waited for the Whites to be defeated before they started their own struggle against the Bol-

² Brovkin, *The Mensheviks after October*, pp. 126–61.

³ Until recently a heretical view, it was expressed by Russian historians V. P. Bulgakov and V. V. Kabanov, "‘Voennyi Kommunizm.’ Ideologiya i obshchestvennoe razvitiye," *Voprosy Istorii*, no. 3 (1990), 40–57, here 51.

sheviks.⁴ In this interpretation peasants were a third force who favored the Reds over the Whites. Indeed they were a third force, but they certainly did not wait for the Whites' defeat; rather they acted throughout this period in their own self-interest against both. On Bolshevik- and White-held territory alike peasants engaged their rulers in a war against the official frontline civil war. The Greens did not want to fight for the Bolsheviks or for the Whites or for anybody else. They deserted en masse to the forests. The Green movement at that stage was defensive in character. The Reds were more adept at mobilizing the population than the Whites; they were better organizers and built a better military machine. That in no way suggests that their cause was supported by the population. The widely held assumption that the victorious side in the frontline civil war must have had the support of the population must be cast aside.

The third stage, 1920–21, was the year of the Greens. The less the danger from the Whites, the greater was the Bolshevik determination to impose control over the countryside. As a Russian historian recently assessed the situation: "By the end of 1920 the geography and scale of peasant insurrections widened. In addition to Ukraine and Siberia they broke out in the southeast and in the Tambov region and in other regions. . . . At the beginning of 1921 powerful peasant insurrections rolled across various parts of the country."⁵ It is essential to point out that the assault on the countryside by all sorts of committees was not a by-product of the Bolshevik war effort against the Whites but rather a sign of normal Communist administration after the danger of the Whites had passed. The peasant war of 1920–21 therefore was a direct consequence of normal, nonwar-related Bolshevik policies—such as labor conscription, the carting obligation, and the sowing committees campaign—which were later named War Communism.

External and Internal Fronts

Even though we customarily refer to all the conflicts and fighting in the 1917–21 period as *the* civil war, in fact there was not one but several overlapping types of war going on at the same time. One can distinguish between a civil war on the external and the internal front. Moreover the participants, their numbers and war aims, and allies and enemies were constantly changing. The civil war on the external front was between rival governments which claimed to control a certain territory and had mobilized armies, a state apparatus, and some sort of administration. In 1918 the civil war between the Bolshevik government controlling a few provinces in central Russia and the cossack regional government

⁴ Radkey, *The Unknown Civil War in Soviet Russia*, pp. 189–90.

⁵ V. V. Kabanov, "Agramnaia Revoliutsiia v Rossii," *Voprosy Istorii*, no. 11 (1989), 36.

on the Don, allied with the SR government of the Constituent Assembly on the Volga, falls into that category.

In 1919 the socialist and cossack governments were replaced by White governments both in the south and in the east and north as the main frontline opponents of the Bolsheviks. Seen from this angle, the frontline civil war between the Communist and regional governments in 1918 and between the Reds and the Whites in 1919 was a civil war within Russian educated society. Each side used state structures and coercion to mobilize peasant masses for a cause into which the peasants had no input. This frontline, government-versus-government civil war was an unwanted war, a war imposed from above, as evidenced by the mass desertions from both the Red and White armies.⁶

At the same time the Communist and the White governments conducted another frontline war against new states formerly belonging to the Russian Empire. This war cannot not be called a civil war, since it was not a war between different parts of one society; rather it was a war to reconquer lost imperial territories: Ukraine in 1918; Ukraine, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia in 1919; Poland, Azerbaijan, and Armenia in 1920; Georgia in 1921; and central Asia in 1920–22. Similarly the war of the White government of Denikin against Ukrainian independence forces in 1919 falls into this category.

The frontline war led by governments on external fronts is the only war that has received scholarly attention. Yet we must appreciate the significance of the civil war on the internal front. This was the civil war conducted by the Red and White governments against populations on the territories they claimed to control. The war of the Communist and White governments against the Green peasant rebels was clearly a civil war of this category. It was a war which involved more people and caused more casualties than the relatively brief campaigns between the Reds and the Whites in 1919.⁷ Unlike the external frontline civil war this war was fought in every corner of the country, in every province and every uезд. It was a war of conquest and subjugation on the governments' side and a partisan guerrilla war of resistance on the peasants' side, a war they waged against participation in the frontline civil war. And it was a war they waged against the extortion of grain on Red territory and against the restoration of landlords' holdings on White territory. Here the peasants' identity as landholders superseded any other allegiance and pitched them against any city intruder, Red or White. As one historian put it, the Russian civil war was over two issues, land and power.⁸ From this perspective peasants fought against the property relations and power structure of both the Reds and the Whites.

The Reds' and the Whites' war on the internal front was not directed against

⁶ For new data on desertion, see von Hagen, *Soldiers in the Proletarian Dictatorship*, pp. 69–70.

⁷ Conquest, *The Harvest of Sorrow*, p. 50.

⁸ Alfred Rieber, "Landed Property, State Authority and Civil War," *Slavic Review*, vol. 47, no. 1 (1988), 29–39, here 37.

peasants only. Both governments also fought on the invisible, internal front against other social groups deemed hostile. The Bolsheviks fought a "class" war against what they called the "bourgeoisie" (property owners, the clergy, officers, "kulaks," "petit bourgeois" elements) and against all political parties: the liberals, the Social Democrats, and the Socialist Revolutionaries. It was an ideological war because the "enemy" was defined exclusively by ideological criteria. Several categories of workers wound up on the list of enemies of the "proletarian dictatorship" as well. In other words the Communists fought this invisible and covert civil war on the internal front against all groups of Russian society.

For the Communists the class war on the internal front was merely an extension of the frontline civil war against the Whites. The Communist government regarded class enemies on the internal front in the same manner as enemies beyond the front line. These people were not covered by laws. Members of the "overthrown bourgeois class" were treated as captured enemies, as POWs. They were forced to dig trenches and incarcerated in concentration camps. Members of their families were taken hostage. They had to pay indemnities, as a defeated country in a war would. Finally they were simply exterminated during periodic waves of Red Terror. To a certain extent the position of a "class enemy" was worse than that of a captured soldier of the White armies. Such a soldier had a chance to claim that he personally was not a supporter of the Whites. A priest, a kulak, or a merchant had no such chance. This was a kind of civil war in which the government did not consider a large part of society to be citizens protected by its laws. As Richard Pipes put it, it was a war of legalized lawlessness.⁹

The Bolshevik policy toward all political parties during the 1917–20 period can be seen as the unfolding of a military campaign aimed at their destruction. The Kadets were outlawed as early as 1917 and later hunted down on Soviet territory. The Mensheviks, SRs, and Left SRs were tolerated longer. Offensives were followed by retreats, legalizations by new waves of terror. Each time the liberal Bolsheviks' policy of toleration gained an upper hand and relatively unobstructed elections to the local soviets (which had no power anyway) were held, the Mensheviks, SRs and Left SRs scored major victories throughout this period. In the 1918 spring elections to the soviets the Mensheviks and SRs actually won in a majority of urban soviets.¹⁰ In the spring elections of 1919¹¹ and 1920 the opposition parties did exceptionally well, and in the spring of 1921 free elections would undoubtedly have produced socialist opposition majorities in major industrial centers and SR majorities in the countryside. At each stage the Bolsheviks tightened the screws further. When these parties were legalized in February 1919, their newspapers were suppressed after two

⁹ Pipes, *The Russian Revolution*, pp. 796–99.

¹⁰ Brovkin, *The Mensheviks after October*, pp. 159–60.

¹¹ For the analysis of village elections of 1919, see Orlando Figes, "The Village and Volost' Soviet Elections of 1919," *Soviet Studies*, vol. 40 (1988), 21–46.

months. Yet they could still talk freely in workers' clubs. In 1920 the opposition parties were allowed to run in elections, but without any press of their own. And in 1921 the Cheka decimated what was left of the opposition parties, driving them into the camps, exile, or underground.

The Cheka engineered splits among opposition parties at every opportunity. Not only did it promote the original split of the PSR into the SR and Left SR parties in December 1917, but it continued along the same path by engineering the split of the Narod group in 1919 and subsequently infiltrating it with Cheka agents and eliminating it altogether. The same tactics were applied in regard to the Left SRs, decimated by arrests after the so-called July 1918 uprising. The Bolsheviks allowed loyal Left SRs to exist if they repudiated "disloyal" Left SRs; the new splits in 1919 and 1920 then made it easier to liquidate this party as well. Similarly the Mensheviks were supposed to expel the right wing from their party as a price for legalization in 1919. Yet both factions were under constant surveillance by the Cheka, and both were destroyed by systematic arrests, exiles, and imprisonments by 1921. The most important aspect of the Bolsheviks' war on the opposition parties was that the Bolsheviks used the instruments of state—the army, the police, agents provocateurs—to promote their party cause. The public domain, which is supposed to assure the well-being of all, was abused to promote the private interests of one party.

The war conducted by the White regime against its internal opponents was similar in character but different in nature and smaller in scale than that of the Reds. White military authorities likewise were engaged in "pacification" campaigns against peasants on the internal front. White officers likewise did not consider socialists to be citizens protected by laws. And they arbitrarily shot them on numerous occasions. The difference between the Reds' and the Whites' war on the internal front was perhaps that Lenin's government used terror as a method of social engineering. The Whites had never cherished a goal of recasting Russian society. They wanted only to preserve it from destruction, as they would put it, and to punish those who, they thought, were responsible for its disintegration. The White generals, at least publicly, praised law and order and guarantees to all citizens regardless of class or nationality. The Whites' war on the peasants and left-wing social elements was an expression of revenge. The peasants had to be taught the lesson that they should not take landlords' lands. The socialists and the Communists had to be taught the lesson that they should not, as the Whites would put it, subvert Holy Russia by foreign and alien teachings. Still their ultimate goal was to impose state authority on separate identities rather than to blend all into one.

The Communist terror on the other hand was part of a grand design to eliminate entire social groups of the population by violence, as obstacles to what the Communists called socialism. The bourgeoisie, as Lenin tirelessly repeated year after year, had to be annihilated. Landlords, capitalists, officers, priests, kulaks, Kadets, Mensheviks, and SRs were to be smashed as well. The

Red Terror of the civil war established and routinized the practice of “processing” entire social strata of people without regard to personal guilt or lack thereof. Anyone could have been labeled a kulak or a hidden counterrevolutionary or a hireling of the bourgeoisie and disappeared not just in 1937 but in 1919.

The key ingredients the Bolsheviks employed in this covert and invisible civil war against society were mass terror and the promotion of divisions within targeted social groups. Traditional ties and identities were smashed and new ones imposed. Peasants were no longer peasants but kulaks, middle peasants, and poor peasants. Some were to be killed, others conscripted, others forced to comply, and still others given a chance to rule over their neighbors as agents of the center. Workers were similarly divided into hereditary proletarians, conscious proletarians, hirelings of the bourgeoisie, petit bourgeois conciliators, and so on. The most active and independent of them were systematically arrested, exiled, and shot throughout 1918–20. The labels the Bolsheviks created had no relation to reality. The main characteristic of the so-called kulaks and petit bourgeois workers was their independence. Anyone who dared to question a Bolshevik policy or action, let alone resist, or who dared to defend traditional values, economic interests, or identities was automatically labeled with one of the crude Marxist terms invented by the Bolsheviks.

The civil war on the internal front systematically exterminated all forces in Russian society capable of and willing to defend their autonomy and identity vis-à-vis the state. The Bolsheviks not only destroyed all the *institutions* of civil society—independent courts, parliamentarianism, an independent press, political parties, local self-government, independent trade unions, and peasant cooperatives—but also any *people* who were associated with them. By 1921 Russia had a very homogeneous society, a society indeed of the masses; its former social groups were stripped of any organizational capacity which could allow them to articulate their separateness or individuality. This war on society was essentially a counterrevolution from above that destroyed European political culture in Russia for seventy years. The Bolsheviks tried to create a melting pot where all local, regional, and separatist identities would melt and the new identity of a New Soviet Man would be forged.

The White Movement

Perhaps one of the most important aspects of the civil war is that it changed the very nature of the major participants. The frontline civil war shaped the White movement. It started out as a movement of dedicated and courageous officers who fought against the Communists without any hope of winning. They defined themselves as Volunteers guided by noble ideas of patriotism. Yet at the height of the frontline civil war the White movement became much more

intolerant, chauvinistic, and anti-Semitic than it had been at the beginning. If the Communists could label anyone "bourgeois," the Whites labeled any opponent a "Communist," for whom no laws applied. He could be shot on the spot. The greatest weakness of the White movement was that it failed to become a unifying national force. It remained almost exclusively a movement of officers. It lacked a social base of any kind. The White movement failed to establish a workable partnership with the liberal and socialist intelligentsia—in political terms with the Kadets, SRs, and Mensheviks, who were indispensable to government administration. The Whites were suspicious of workers and revengeful in regard to peasants. They failed to attract the Ukrainians and the cossacks to mutually shared goals. The White movement failed to organize a disciplined army let alone a state administration. The Whites improvised the state. On many occasions they simply bluffed. They did not really have a state apparatus, an administration, police, banks, money, or any recruiting capacity. They pretended as if they were the state and tried to cover up their actual weakness by brutally enforcing their claims. Only with the greatest difficulty can one speak of a Kolchak government. It did not govern. Its laws and decrees were of little relevance to the huge territory it claimed to control. In Siberia field commanders did whatever they pleased. They were completely autonomous in their military and civilian policies and actions. Siberia under Kolchak was essentially a conglomeration of warlords' fiefdoms, only nominally under "government" control. The warlords' least concern was to govern their area of occupation; they wanted only to extract from it whatever was needed to sustain their military independence.¹²

Denikin's army was more centralized and disciplined than that of Kolchak. Denikin himself complained, however, that he had no control over the officers and was powerless to prevent Jewish pogroms. If the general was powerless to control his own army, how could he lead an entire society? Society was beyond his reach. It was simply under his occupation. The minds and the hearts of all those who greeted the Whites as liberators were quickly lost for the White movement, due to pogroms, lawlessness, corruption, and the arbitrariness of its military commanders.

The Kadets

If the White movement failed to consolidate the forces of anti-Bolshevik Russia, the Kadet party failed to lead the White movement. Of all the Russian political parties the Kadets had the most administrative and organizational talent. They were a party of professors, lawyers, and businessmen.¹³ They had

¹² For a remarkable discussion of the popular movement under Kolchak, see Norman Pereira, "The Partisan Movement in Western Siberia, 1918–1920," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, vol. 38, no. 1 (1990), 88–97.

¹³ There is only one study of the Kadets: Rosenberg, *Liberals in the Russian Revolution*.

enough talent and experience in their ranks to establish a functioning administration on the territory cleared of the Bolsheviks overnight. They were a party that had won close to 25 percent of the urban national vote in the Constituent Assembly elections. And yet they were a party whose input into national politics during the Russian civil war was negligible. Why?

The Kadets were removed from the majority of the Russian people, the workers and peasants. Culturally there was a gulf between them. The Kadets were the educated and Europeanized part of society, whose very identity was based on Europeaness rather than Russianness. The Kadets defined themselves as enlightened, progressive, educated leaders of backward Russia. They looked down on the Russian muzhik as a dark and Asiatic, primitive and uncivilized beast. They had no words to address the Russian peasants. For most Kadets the Russian revolution was nothing but chaos, *bunt*, *Pugachevshchina*, or the Time of Troubles. They craved law and order through force. The way they saw themselves and their role defined their allegiance to the White movement, which alone seemed to be able to restore Russia. By that they meant the empire, since Ukraine for them was certainly a part of Russia. The Constitutional Democrats were imperialists and no democrats. Their political behavior betrays their insecurity. Instead of leading, they themselves sought protection from anyone who was ready to offer it. In 1918 the Kadets sought it from the German Kaiser, and in 1919 from the Allies and the generals. The liberal wing of the party made feeble attempts to influence Denikin's policy and act as if it were the intellectual trust of the Whites. The right wing succumbed to seeing its priorities in terms of revenge on all those who, as they believed, had betrayed Holy Russia. Hence in 1919 the party of People's Liberty, as it called itself, refused to condemn anti-Jewish pogroms on "liberated" territory. Russian liberals ended up in the company of the Black Hundreds.

The Party of Socialist Revolutionaries

The PSR is hardly ever mentioned in studies of Russian society during the civil war. The biggest Russian political party has been forgotten and ignored. According to Moshe Lewin: "The SRs were not a factor in the civil war, and hence not a factor at all."¹⁴ In fact the PSR played a very important although tragic role in the Russian civil war. It was the only party in Russia fortunate enough to win a popular majority in national elections, but at the same time it consistently lost every time it tried to struggle for political power. The tragedy of the PSR was that it split into rival factions at every critical stage, and those factions neutralized each other pursuing contrary policies. Thus in October 1917 the Left SRs greatly helped the Bolsheviks seize power by splitting the PSR and the peasant movement. Similarly in October 1918, when the crucial decisions on

¹⁴ Moshe Lewin, "More Than One Piece Is Missing in the Puzzle," *Slavic Review*, vol. 44, no. 2 (1985), 243.

forming a national anti-Bolshevik government at the Ufa state conference were made, the center-left wing and the right wing of the party were pursuing mutually exclusive objectives. The center-left wing of Victor Chernov distrusted the officers, and the PSR's right wing of N. D. Avksentiev was too eager to strike a deal with conservative forces. This led to neither faction's achieving its objectives.

The PSR was the largest party in Russia. It was the only mass party and a truly Russian party that relied not on a foreign but on a Russian-rooted populist ideology. It was an intelligentsia party for peasants. Its strength was in its numbers, which could have mattered a great deal in electoral politics. Its weakness was in the dispersion of its social base. The warring PSR factions relied on different social strata of peasants. The conservative elements in the party were mostly associated with cooperatives, *zemstvos*, and other well-established and formerly prosperous elements of the rural community. The more radical wing of the SRs were intellectuals and those who identified with the more dispossessed layers of the peasantry.

The SRs were a markedly different sort of people in temperament from the Mensheviks. Their factional differences always led to a party split. At the same time all SRs, from the most radical to the most conservative, no matter how much they detested one another, were proud to be Socialist Revolutionaries and shared a profound, unshakable, and deeply rooted love for the Russian countryside and Russian peasants. The PSR was close to success throughout the civil wars years, but long-lasting victories eluded it. In 1918 it almost succeeded in providing a socialist alternative to Communist rule, only to be defeated by combined pressure from the Red Army, White putschists, peasant apathy, and internal party strife.

The PSR almost succeeded in leading a peasant insurrectionary movement in 1919, but the party had reservations about the timeliness of overthrowing the Bolsheviks. Due to Bolshevik terror it never quite became the organizational center of peasant resistance. Again in 1920–21 the SRs were close to realizing their cherished goal of a peasant war against the Bolsheviks in many if not all provinces of Russia. The peasant war, under predominantly SR slogans, did seriously threaten the viability of Lenin's regime, yet it could not topple it. The PSR was the party closest to the peasants, but lacking clarity of goals and direction, it failed to prevail over the Communists.

The Mensheviks

The impact of the civil war on the Menshevik party was most devastating. It was a political party that strived to defend workers' interests, but the virtual disappearance of the workers as a distinct social group undercut the SDs' social base. More serious was the rift between the leaders, who came from the intelligentsia,

and the mass of workers. Railway workers, printers, and munitions factory workers were much more radically anti-Bolshevik than the SD leadership. Under the impact of the civil war Menshevism as an intellectual current of socialist thought and the Mensheviks as a political party split de facto into two parts. The first signs of that rift occurred in 1918 over the issue of the SRs' rebellion on the Volga. To side with the SRs or not to side, that was the question. The Right Mensheviks decided to side with them and fight the Bolsheviks, and the Left Mensheviks decided to remain neutral.

In 1919 the Mensheviks' rift became deeper. The two factions had come to fundamentally different definitions of the Communist regime and the development of capitalism and socialism. The Left Mensheviks saw the Bolsheviks as undemocratic but reformable, as trying to build socialism but in the wrong way and by the wrong methods. The Right Mensheviks regarded the Communists as traitors to the Russian democratic movement, as usurpers and dictators, as builders of a monstrous regime, unreformable and unforeseen by Marxism. Before anyone else, the Right Mensheviks perceived and predicted what we now call the totalitarian transformation of Leninism. The Right Mensheviks were closer to the rebellious workers in spirit but not intellectually. Workers were angry, hungry, and concerned with everyday issues: bread, strikes, and commissars' privileges. The Right Mensheviks were, for the most part, intellectuals who had contacts with but were not themselves workers. The Mensheviks' lively interfactional debate, which raged in the midst of the civil war, kept the party alive intellectually. Many of the Mensheviks' ideas, like those expressed in *What Is to Be Done?* no doubt influenced Lenin and others in their search for an acceptable and workable economic policy. The intellectual division between the Right and Left Mensheviks foreshadowed a division along the same lines of the entire social-liberal Western intelligentsia for decades to come. Like the Left Mensheviks, many continued to believe that Bolshevism was essentially a progressive movement, but like the Right Mensheviks, some came to believe that Bolshevism signified a historical catastrophe for socialism, discrediting the idea for generations to come.

Even though in the context of 1921 the Mensheviks appear as a party that lost, in a long-term perspective they might have been satisfied, if they could have lived to see the evolution of Bolshevism over seventy years. With great satisfaction both Right and Left Mensheviks could claim to have won their historical argument with the Communists. Such Communist ideas as the dictatorship of the proletariat, the elimination of private property, and the destruction of capitalism have turned out to be utopian and useless notions. On the other hand the SD tenets that socialism is unthinkable without democracy, that a mixed economy and private enterprise are here to stay, that workers' rights are best defended not by a "proletarian state" but by independent social forces, unions, laws for all, and democratic guarantees—these ideas were accepted at least in theory by the heirs of Lenin and Stalin.

The Bolsheviks

The Bolsheviks believed that they were the party of the proletariat. That does not mean that we have to accept their claim at face value.¹⁵ The Bolshevik party started out as a loosely organized radical revolutionary party of intellectuals claiming to speak for workers in 1917. It seized power relying largely on soldiers and sailors. In early 1918 it lost the lion's share of the workers' vote it had gained in the fall of 1917. By mid-1918 it had become a besieged minority governing party, ready to secure its survival by mass terror. By mid-1919 the Communist party had become a military-industrial mobilization agency in control of the state apparatus, dedicated to self-preservation at whatever cost. Let us not be fooled by the Communists' rhetoric that they represented the working class. It was an ideological cover to sustain their claim to rule Russia, a fake identity to hide their lack of legitimacy. The Bolshevik party claimed to be a workers' party but in fact treated workers as subsistence-level recruits for labor armies.¹⁶ It was a party without a clearly defined social base. By mid-1918 it was no longer a political party in the old sense of the word, since it no longer expressed the interests of any social group as such; rather it recruited its members from many social groups. Former workers, soldiers, peasants, or officers, once Communists, were turned into a new social group in its own right. Their status in society, their material position, their bread rations, their behavior patterns, their access to privilege and to power, and the laws that governed their behavior put them apart from the rest of society. They acquired the new identity of a vanguard, as they thought, in fact a privileged elite. Their allegiance was not to ideas or to the laws they themselves had passed or to the institutions they staffed. All that could be cast aside. Their allegiance was first and foremost to the Party, since that was the source of everything. The CP became a self-recruiting and self-sustaining military-industrial and administrative apparatus.

The impact of the civil war on the CP was, it seems, twofold. The first impact was the militarization of Bolshevism.¹⁷ This applied not only to party structures and institutions—the Cheka, the army, and the bureaucracy—but most importantly to the party members' mentality. The Communists got used to thinking in terms of military campaigns, offensives and retreats, commanders and soldiers. Obedience, discipline, and submission became positive virtues, rather than spontaneity, initiative, and challenging authority. The military mentality necessarily defined failures and disasters as consequences of treason, desertion,

¹⁵ Sheila Fitzpatrick, "The Bolshevik Dilemma: Class, Culture, and Politics in Early Soviet Years," *Slavic Review*, vol. 47, no. 4 (1988), 599–614, here 601.

¹⁶ For the opposite view stressing "circumstance" in the Bolshevik mistreatment of workers, see William Rosenberg, "The Social Background to Tsekrtran," in Koenker, ed., *Party, State and Society in the Russian Civil War*, pp. 349–74.

¹⁷ Alfred Rieber, "Landed Property, State Authority and Civil War," *Slavic Review*, vol. 47, no. 1 (1988), 37.

and subversion. A change of policy was inevitably perceived as a retreat. For many decades the Communists defined every project in terms of military campaigns: the socialist “offensive,” the industrial or ideological or transport “front.” The concept “building socialism,” which was originally understood as creating the fullest possible democracy and unleashing the initiative of the masses, was turned into “fighting” on the industrial front, the collectivization front, or the ideological front. Those who criticized or disobeyed, doubted, or refused orders were automatically perceived as deserters, provocateurs, traitors, and enemies of the people. Stalin did not invent those terms. Bukharin, Trotsky, and all other top Bolsheviks used them in 1920. The self-definition of rank-and-file Bolsheviks as fighters on such and such a front was in place by 1921. That is why the political culture of *debate*, which still lingered among old-time Bolsheviks who had come out of the Social Democratic tradition, did not find any substantial audience among the Bolsheviks of the 1920s. The Communist party had already become an “Order of Crusaders” well before Stalin took control.

The militarization of Bolshevik political culture was also a result of the intellectual void Bolshevism found itself in since it isolated itself from the political community of the rest of the nation. Once everybody else was an enemy, there was no one to argue with anymore. The Bolsheviks convinced themselves that what they were creating was socialism, and anyone who disagreed with them was a counterrevolutionary by definition. The self-imposed intellectual isolation of Bolshevism contributed to its militarization, sterilization, and eventual hollowness decades later.

The second important impact of the civil war was that the CP became terrified of the peasants. The generation of Communists formed in those years went through a most bitter, bloody, and dangerous war with the peasantry. So many of their comrades were slaughtered by the “Green bandits.” So many times, in so many places, their power was overthrown or threatened by the peasants. The Communists were always aware that they were a minority party in a hostile peasant sea. In view of the danger that the peasant sea would engulf the CP, Lenin sounded what he called a “retreat” from the Communist offensive into the NEP (military terminology again). However, the CP was ready for a final battle with the “Green bandits,” with the “kulaks” and other “enemies” of Soviet power, at a later date. Intellectual dogmatization, isolation and militarization, combined with a deeply seated hostility to and suspicion of peasants, critics, socialists, and hidden enemies, created the ingredients of Stalinist totalitarian political culture in Lenin’s CP.

The Greens

The Green movement was clearly the most numerous of all parties and movements in the civil war. It was a true people’s movement embracing hundreds of

thousands of peasants. Its impact on the course of the civil war itself and on the future of Russia was enormous. In terms of the number of people involved and the impact on the nation the peasant war overshadowed and outlasted the Bolshevik war with the Whites. Due to peasant uprisings behind Bolshevik lines in 1919 the Whites were able to march as far as they did, and it was due to peasant uprisings behind White lines that the Reds were able to break through the White front. It was due to peasant uprisings that Lenin finally decided to put Communism on hold in 1921. The Green movement ruined some and brought others to victory. It was a decisive third force in the civil war, but it did not become an independent contending power center except on a regional scale. Why?

Why did the movement that had more people in it than all the Russian political parties and the Red and White armies combined not prevail? The answer, it seems, should be sought in the mentality and identity of the Russian peasants. The Greens defended their own villages from outsiders. In most cases that was the end of their political aspirations. The peasants could not win because they never even tried to conquer the state. They tried to hit the state and force it to leave them alone. Ideas like freedom and democracy were understood as Russian *Volia*, that is, freedom from the state, from any obligations to anybody. European ideas of a democratic republic, the rule of law, equality, and parliamentarianism—all these ideas that the SRs brought into the peasant milieu were mostly incomprehensible to peasants. Neither of course were the notions brought by the Bolsheviks: internationalism, socialism, or Marxism. The fundamental problem was that the peasants and the Russian intelligentsia spoke different languages; they spoke by each other, not to each other. The failure of the democratic alternative parties of the Mensheviks and SRs was rooted in the fact that they represented the European and cultured part of Russian society while the masses they claimed to lead were still premodern, parochial, and village-oriented, for whom concepts of citizenship and civil rights were distant. This does not mean that workers and peasants were any closer to Bolshevik ideology. On the contrary the workers and peasants continuously fought against the new masters, the new barin. Yet the way they fought was the way of an old Russian *bunt*, a rebellion, which was unacceptable to the intelligentsia leaders.

Scope of the Peasant War

Evan Mawdsley in his recent study has used a metaphor, cossack Vendée, a term he borrowed from the Communist propagandists.¹⁸ It is supposed to evoke an image of a backward counterrevolutionary province loyal to the old regime,

¹⁸ Mawdsley, *The Russian Civil War*, pp. 85–99.

an obstacle to revolution, and most importantly an exception from the rest of the country. The image is supposed to legitimize the defeat and destruction of a counterrevolutionary province. There are, of course, striking similarities between the Vendée revolt of 1793 in France and the uprising in cossack lands of 1919–20, but nevertheless those events are of a different kind. Just as Vendée peasants did not fight “the revolution” or the *patrie* but the terrorist dictatorship of Parisian Jacobins, the cossacks did not fight the “worker and peasant republic” but the state terrorists in the Kremlin. They started their rebellion only after the Moscow Bolsheviks embarked upon decossackization, designed to destroy cossacks as a “class.” Their war against the Bolsheviks was defensive, and their alliance with the Whites a marriage of convenience. It was their reluctance both in 1919 and in 1920 to advance beyond their native land that crippled the White offensive and spelled the ultimate defeat for both cossacks and Whites. The parallel between the Don and Vendée is most startling in the methods employed by the Jacobins and Bolsheviks in their subjugation of the unfortunate province: systematic plunder, devastation, rape, murder, and mass executions of civilians. The Bolsheviks added to this hostage taking, concentration camps, and mass deportations.

But the differences between the two are even more important. If the Vendée was an exception, Don and Kuban were the rule. How many Vendées were there in Russia? Was Tambov Province another Vendée? Was Saratov, Samara, Tsaritsyn, Simbirsk, Kazan, Penza, Voronezh, Ufa—that is, the entire lower Volga basin and the Urals—another Vendée? Was Kiev, Poltava, Volyn’—the entire left bank Ukraine—another Vendée? How can we judge? If our criterion is mass participation in a peasant war against a state terrorist regime, then the entire Ukraine, the entire black earth region of southern Russia, the cossack lands of Don and Kuban, the Volga basin and the Urals, and large parts of Siberia would qualify. This means that the entire grain-producing area in Russia and Ukraine was one huge Vendée.

Character of the Peasant War

Each party tried to employ its own explanatory schemes to describe peasant rebels. “Bandits,” “kulaks,” “hiding officers,” “SR conspirators,” “deserters,”—these were the favorite Bolshevik labels for the Greens. Images of hardworking and innocent peasants abused by local Communist tyrants are frequent in SR literature. The Communist myth of “bad kulaks, good proletarian cause” can be counterpoised to the SR myth of “bad Bolsheviks, good peasants.” The reality of the peasant war was more complex. There were of course innocent and hardworking peasants and Communist tyrants. But the point is that from among these hardworking peasants rose rebels fascinated by the idea of “Loot the Looters,” and from among the same peasants rose others who aspired to

become new "tsars and lords." In terms of their attitudes to life, death, power, and authority, were they that far apart?

The problem with both myths is that on closer examination those local officials who acted on behalf of the Bolsheviks and those rebellious peasants who fought under the nominal command of A. S. Antonov or Nestor Makhno revealed similar cultural and behavioral patterns. For both parties in this carnage the cause of proletarian dictatorship or peasant justice was but a smoke screen for an unbridled Russian free-for-all, *volnitsa*. Those who pillaged and raped as members of Bolshevik punitive expeditions were not that different from Antonov's or Makhno's rebels who pillaged and killed for peasant justice. The essence of peasant rebellion was liberation from all authority. Everything was permissible. It was "Loot the Looters" all over again. For Bolshevik punitive detachments that meant a license to do whatever they pleased in the hostile countryside: burn, destroy, and kill in "the bandit nests." For Green "bandits" it meant a similar freedom to obliterate any attributes of aliens' or outsiders' presence in their native land. For Makhno's bands it was freedom to ransack the cities and for Petliura's cossacks to massacre Jews. Peasant war was a carnival of revolution.

The central permanent feature of the Russian civil war was that all the armies involved, the Reds and the Whites, the cossacks in 1919, and the Greens in 1920, went along essentially the same path beginning with a cause based on ideals and degenerating into marauding and debauchery. The Whites, the Greens, the cossacks, and the Reds went through this cycle. Red authorities talked of socialism and exterminated cossacks. Denikin issued orders against Jewish pogroms but was unable to prevent them. Nestor Makhno swore that he did not offend the Jews, but his troops staged pogroms. The cossacks rose in a valiant rebellion against the Bolsheviks and ended up slaughtering Jews.¹⁹ Fighters in the field (of all the armies) always seemed to get out of control. If an observer did not know which army was passing through a town, say in Tambov Province in mid-1919, that of White general Mamontov or a division of the Reds or a band of Antonov's Greens or some itinerant unit of cossacks, he would not be able to tell them apart. Their esprit de corps was remarkably similar. For all of them war was a carnival: seize, loot, ride a horse, drink, and enjoy life; everything is permissible. It was not uncommon in central Russia and especially in Ukraine that the same individuals served in several or all armies, Red, White, and Green. This is not to suggest that there was no difference between them. This is to point to a similarity in spirit and to the overall brutalization of society.

The reality of the civil war shows that distinctions between good and evil were blurred. Rebels fighting a requisition detachment come across as freedom

¹⁹ For remarkable data on the anti-Jewish pogroms by all these forces, see Heifetz, *The Slaughter of the Jews in the Ukraine in 1919*.

fighters defending their property. Yet the same detachment executing the family of a Communist functionary comes across as committing a crime. Similarly a Communist detachment shelling a village may be seen as an instrument of state terrorism, but the same detachment attacking a hiding place of rebels comes across as acting in self-defense. Ukrainian rebels destroying a Communist-held railway station no doubt believed they were fulfilling the patriotic duty of national liberation. But the same detachment robbing and killing Jews in a little village for ostensible collaboration with the Bolsheviks can be judged as committing a crime against humanity. Where is the difference between heroes and murderers? Between patriots and Black Hundreds?

The carnage between peasant rebels and former peasants turned soldiers in Bolshevik detachments, seen from this perspective, reveals a collision of the two branches of the peasant community in Russia: those who believed in peasant justice under no state control on the rebel side, and those who shouted "Loot the kulaks" and aspired to be new masters on the Communist side. The life of an individual became cheap. Guilt by association was commonplace. The dehumanization of enemies by labeling allowed for mass violence on an unprecedented scale. Settling scores with real and imaginary opponents became the essence of politics. The civil war routinized the unthinkable. It incorporated mass murder into the routine of government. It accustomed one to thinking in terms of enemies to be unmasked. It substituted for politics as usual the politics of war. The civil war meant a profound brutalization of society and especially of its new ruling class.

Military Victory

All political parties during the Russian civil war—the Bolsheviks, the White generals, peasant rebel headquarters, and SRs—tried and failed to control the peasant movement. It produced its own leaders, men from the people: Makhno, Antonov, Kolesnikov, Sapozhnikov, and Vakhulin, to name only a few. These leaders were guided by notions of peasant justice and vague echoes from the platforms of political parties, mostly of an anarchist or Left or Right SR variety. Yet all parties were associated with state order, with programs and governments, whereas these concepts were alien to local peasant leaders. Parties represented national politics, and the peasants represented prenational identity and regional allegiance. One of the reasons the peasant movement did not win militarily, despite its magnitude and scope, was that each province or area of several provinces had its own political dynamics out of tune with the rest of the country. At a time when in one province the Greens were defeated, in another the uprising would only be beginning. None of the Green leaders ventured outside their immediate vicinity or at most beyond surrounding provinces. In this spontaneity, scope, and breadth also lay the movement's strength,

since peasant rebellions could erupt anywhere anytime. Indeed in March 1921 large parts of the country were ungovernable. The Soviet regime could have collapsed. Peasant rebellions were out of control, like a forest fire. Therein lay the Greens' power and also their helplessness against a systematic assault. The Bolsheviks, invested with the powers of the state, recruiting and commanding a huge army, overwhelmed the peasant rebels militarily. They did it by a systematic occupation of villages, mass executions, and deportations of tens of thousands.

The key to the Bolshevik victory was not merely in the application of sheer force but in dividing the peasant community and inducing it, as a hostage, to participate in its own self-destruction.²⁰ The Bolsheviks created their own constituency in the countryside by forcing some to cooperate and rewarding them at the expense of others. They enveloped the peasant community in a network of committees and agencies never tried on such a scale in the Russian village before. They were a party geared to handle and process millions of people. The Bolsheviks, a small minority, overwhelmed the peasantry because they were willing to employ all the coercive instruments at the disposal of a twentieth-century state against a nineteenth-century peasantry.

Russian peasants lacked political consciousness in the sense that they did not care what form of government Russia as a country had. They did not care about parliaments or freedom of the press and assembly. On the whole they were satisfied with economic concessions. The survival of the Bolshevik dictatorship throughout the ordeal of the civil war can therefore be seen not as a manifestation of popular support but as a manifestation of the prenational consciousness and backwardness of the Russian peasantry, the majority of the nation. And the brutality of the new regime was partly a manifestation of the crassness and brutality of those Bolshevik upstarts who strove to become "tsars and lords."

On the other hand if the Bolsheviks had not physically destroyed the opposition parties, those parties probably would have had considerable followings in the post-civil war years. They would have continued their decades-old efforts to bring the elements of European political culture to the Russian masses. The persistence with which Russian workers demanded free soviets and independent unions, strike after strike, year after year, suggests that a democratic political culture had roots at least among the workers, and it took an all-out Bolshevik terror to destroy it.

The tragedy of Russian society was in its disjointedness, the lack of understanding between its diverse parts. Each of them pulled in a different direction, thus making it easier for the Communists to prevail. The Mensheviks were right that Russia was not ready for socialism. One can add that it was not ready for democratic parliamentary statehood. The cultural level of the majority of the

²⁰ I owe thanks to Jan Gross for this concept. He developed it studying the Soviet occupation of eastern Poland in 1939; see *Revolution from Abroad*, pp. 225–41.

population was low. And when, during the civil war, educated society was destroyed, it is no wonder that the new bosses, reared in the civil war, retained power and defined socialism as a centralized dictatorial command economy system where no laws existed for any enemies. From this historical perspective it is irrelevant whether Lenin might have lived longer or whether Trotsky rather than Stalin stood at the helm or whether Bukharin's rather than Stalin's methods of collectivization were used. The number of deaths might have been different but not the substance of the political culture. The system that emerged was a product of Lenin's doctrinairism, of a primitivized, vulgar Marxism detached from the humanistic European tradition and brutalized by the civil war.

Who Won? Who Lost?

The end of the civil war and the introduction of the NEP is usually presented in Western historiography with two contradictory interpretations. On the one hand the civil war ended with the Red Victory, on the other the Bolsheviks had to retreat into the NEP. We have a metaphor here of retreating conquerors and of a victory incomplete. Who won and who lost in the civil war of the Bolsheviks with the peasants? Huge parts of the country, formerly grain producing, were devastated. Half a million peasants died in the peasant war of 1919–20. Even more died in the famine of 1921–22. If the Bolshevik regime was to survive, unlike its Jacobin predecessor, a retreat was in order.

The Communist retreat into the NEP was certainly a peasant victory. From the perspective of 1922 they won. The Bolsheviks were forced to leave them alone. They could produce, sell, and govern themselves at the village level with a minimal Communist presence. That is exactly what the peasants had fought for. Their war aims were fulfilled. The NEP was their victory and the Communists' defeat.

Legacy

The legacy left by that war is much more important than the question of who won and who lost by the standards of 1922. It is naive to believe that in March 1921, as if by magic, when one method of grain collection was changed to a less violent one, the experiences and habits of the civil war vanished. All those peasants who had opted to become soviet chairmen, Red Army officers, or *volost'* Executive Committee members knew with whom they were dealing. They brought a profound fear of peasant wrath to the Bolshevik party. They knew that any new outburst of peasant protest might mean the end of their lives. Was it that surprising, then, that after a six-year breathing spell the Bolsheviks

resumed the offensive? Was it surprising that this time the Bolsheviks would not put up with peasant control of the food supply? Was it surprising that upon resuming their storming of the countryside the Bolsheviks decided to impose control not only over the target quantities of grain to be delivered but over the very grain-producing process as well?

The second Bolshevik onslaught on the countryside was even more devastating: burned villages, shootings, and mass deportations of hundreds of thousands. This time the peasants lost and the Bolsheviks won, or so it seemed. The following decades saw a steady depeasantization of Russia, a progressive pauperization of the countryside, and its depopulation. And yet the triumph of Soviet power in the countryside may yet turn out to be a Pyrrhic victory. Despite decades of socialist construction, the country has not been able to feed itself. Economic stagnation prompted a search for reform in the late 1980s. Reformers came to the conclusion that if there was any way out, it was in private agriculture and peasant ownership of the land. This suggests that in the long-term perspective the Bolsheviks lost. They had to abandon the fruits of their victory of 1921 and 1934. Despite decades of dictatorship, Russian society is back. Political parties, an independent press, cossack assemblies, independent unions, and scores of other civic organizations have reappeared after the collapse of Communism. The single identity of New Soviet Man that the Communists tried to impose on all has now been cast aside, and Russia is desperately searching for its new identity and its place in the world. One can only hope that its transition to a modern and complex society will not lead this time to a catastrophe like the one the country experienced in 1917–22.

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"Doklady upolnomochennogo TsKa RKP(b) i VTsIK Dobrokhotova o sostoianii partiinoi i Sovetskoi raboty i provedenii mobilizatsii v Yaroslavskoi gubernii."

Fond 446. Internal political situation under Denikin.

Opis' 2. Documents on the political situation in Kuban under Denikin; data on political attitudes in the Kuban Rada; secret reports of the Propaganda Department of the Special Conference on Political Parties and Groups in the south of Russia, 1919; assessments of the political situation in Ukraine.

"O nastroenii na Kubani v sviazi s ubiistvom Riabovola."

"Sekretnaia svodka otdela propagandy Osobovo Soveshchaniia o politicheskikh partiakh i organizatsiakh."

Fond 439, Opis' 1. Denikin's letters and memorandums to the Special Conference on Workers' Legislation.

"Pis'mo Denikina po fabrichno-zavodskomu zakonodatel'stvu na imia predsedatelia Osobovo Soveshchaniia Generala Dragomilova."

Fond 5451. Pervaia Armiia Truda (The First Labor Army).

Opis' 4. Protocols of the Revolutionary Council of the First Labor Army, 1920.

TS.G.A.S.A. TSENTRAL'NYI GOSUDARSTVENNYI ARKHIV SOVETSKOI ARMII (CENTRAL STATE ARCHIVE OF THE SOVIET ARMY), MOSCOW

Fond 42. Glavnoe Upravlenie Vnutrennikh Voisk (The main directorate of Internal Security troops).

Opis' 1. Documents on operations against deserters and the Greens.

Fond 192. The Ninth Army of the southern front. Survey of soldiers' political attitudes; orders of military and civilian authorities to the local population in view of the Green insurgency; and data on all kinds of violations, poaching, and aerial bombardment of the Greens.

Opis' 1. Politotdel 9oi armii (Political Department of the Ninth Army).

Voenno-Tsenzurnoe otdelenie Revvoensoveta 9oi armii: "Politsvodka 9oi armii za aprel 1920" (Military Censorship Department of the Revolutionary War Council of the Ninth Army: Political survey of the Ninth Army for April 1920).

Telegramma v Shtab 9oi armii ot: Predsedatelia Gubernskogo Revoliutsionnogo Komiteta (19 July 1919).

"Prikaz Revvoensoveta 9oi armii i Kubansko-Chernomorskogo Revkoma" (2 July 1920), Ekaterinodar.

"Svodka no. 127 Informatsionno-Instruktorskogo podotdela Kubansko-Chernomorskogo otdela upravleniia" (7 October 1920).

"Raport. Ot: Voennogo Kommissara polevogo upravleniia aviatsii pri shtabe 9oi armii" (14 July 1919), Penza.

Fond 193: The Tenth Army of the southern front.

Opis' 1. Documents of the Revolutionary Military Council of the Tenth Army; memorandums on political attitudes of soldiers and civilian population; data on supply and desertion and military operations; and copies of orders of the Central Commission for the Struggle against Desertion in Moscow (Tsentrkomdezertir).

"Prikaz Tsentrkomdezertir" (13 December 1919).

"Postanovlenie Soveta Truda i Oborony."

Archives of the Institute for Social History, Amsterdam

PAVEL AXELROD ARCHIVE

Axelrod's correspondence with Iulii Martov, Boris Vasil'ev, B. Skomorovsky, Raphail Abramovich, and other leading Mensheviks. Reports and memorandums on conditions in Russia.

RSDRP ARCHIVE

Most Menshevik party documents are at the Hoover Institution. Here are appeals and memorandums to the Socialist and Social Democratic parties of Europe and CC incoming correspondence.

Glavnyi Komitet RSDRP na Ukraine (1 December 1920).

THE ARCHIVE OF THE PSR

Contains systematic data on the PSR by far superior to what is available in Moscow or the Hoover Institution.

SR party documents. PSR Central Committee correspondence with local organizations: "Vsem organizatsiiam PSR," *Biulleten' TsKa PSR* (3 December 1919), folder 2004.

"Ko vsem Organizatsiiam Partii Sotsialistov Revoliutsionerov" (summer 1919), folder 2003.

"Vsem Organizatsiiam PSR," *Biulleten' TsKa PSR* (3 December 1919), underground publication, folder 2004.

"Polozhenie na Urale. Pis'mo iz Ekaterinburga," a handwritten letter to the PSR Central Committee, folder 2045.

Proceedings of PSR congresses and conferences: "Deviaty Sovet Partii Sotsialistov Revoliutsionerov," folder 2003.

Protokoly TsKa PSR: konferentsiia 25–27 Sentiabria 1920 goda, folder 2006.

Left SR party documents: *Izvestiia TsKa LSR* (26 November 1919), folder 2021.

Protocols of the interrogation of Kolchak: folder 2028.

Politics in cossack lands: "Don, Kuban', Terek," in an underground newspaper, *Listok "Dela naroda,"* folder 2003.

STEPAN INANOVICH (PORTUGEIS) ARCHIVE

Workers Under Kolchak: "Otchet Delegatsii Prof. Soiuzov Urala, 1918–1919," Strumilo folder.

Letter to Martov (18 February 1921).

Right Menshevik documents: Gruppa Sotsial Demokratov, Petrograd, (May 1920).

Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford, California**NICOLAEVSKY COLLECTION**

Series 6: Materialy TsKa (Materials of the Menshevik Central Committee).

Box 5: "Proekt osnovnykh polozhenii platformy" (December 1918).

"O polozhenii v Sovetskoii Rossii. Doklad pravykh men'shevikov." "Ot Petrogradskoi gruppy Men'shevikov Shvedskim Tovarishcham" (end of 1918 by Petrograd Mensheviks grouped around Potresov).

"O polozhenii v Sovetskoii Rossii. Doklad pravykh men'shevikov."

"Taktika RSDRP v Sovetskoii Rossii" (13 July 1920).

"Memorandum TsKa RSDRP Angliiskoi delegatsii."

Box 6. *Workers under Kolchak:* "Socialist activities and trade union movements in 1919 under A. V. Kolchak. Survey and five articles from *Sibirskii Rabochii.*"

Series 7: Party of Socialist Revolutionaries.

"Pervoe Vserossiiskoe Soveshchanie po partiinoi rabote v derevne," in Chernov, Viktor, "Bolsheviki v derevne," box 10, folder 14.

"Theses adopted by the Plenum of the PSR Central Committee" (underground publication), box 8.

SRs in Siberia: V. Chernov, "'Chernovskaia Gramota' i Ufimskaia Direktoriia" (manuscript), box 10.

Series 16: Pavel Axelrod papers. Correspondence with key Menshevik party leaders, including Iu. Martov, F. Dan, R. Abramovich, B. Skomorovsky, B. Vasiliev, and others.

Series 17: Iu. O. Martov papers. Correspondence with Pavel Axelrod, A. N. Stein, S. D. Shchupak; speeches and articles.

Series 89, box 143: Cheka documents. "Tsirkuliarnoe pis'mo Vecheka."

ARKHIV SHTABA GLAVNOKOMANDUITUSHCHEGO VOORUZHENNYMI SILAMI NA IUGE ROSSII (WRANGEL ARCHIVE)

Intelligence data on the political situation on Bolshevik-held territory: "Svodka razvedyvatelnogo otdeleniia po dannym k 19 oktiabria 1919 goda. Vnutrennee polozhenie Sovetskoi respubliki," document 147.

Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of Russia and the Soviet Union, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Documents of the Department of State on Russia are arranged in a decimal file which reflects the consecutive order of when documents were received regardless of the place of origin or the subject matter. For example, documents of the Denikin administration which were officially passed on to the United States may appear as dispatches of an American consul in Constantinople or Rome or any other European capital. American consuls in Vyborg (Finland), Riga (Latvia), and other listening posts drafted weekly reports on conditions in Russia based on intelligence information, wireless intercepts, periodicals, and other sources. The decimal file 861.00 is devoted to political affairs in Russia, and the period under investigation here starts with decimal files 861.00.3601 (January–February 1919) up to 861.00.7801 (January 1921).

Among the most valuable materials in this collection are the reports of Mr. Imbrie, American consul in Vyborg, who systematically monitored the political situation in Petrograd and sent detailed and regular dispatches which included intelligence assessments of the political situation in Russia, reports by agents described as "acting on office instructions," and clippings of Russian newspapers. Mr. Imbrie also sent posters and proclamations which his agents picked up in Petrograd "on office instructions."

Of great interest are reports to President Wilson by Red Cross officials, among them Mr. Teusler on Bolshevik atrocities in 1919, and the observations of General Graves on conditions in Siberia under Kolchak.

Many documents were received from Allied intelligence, namely the British. Some documents had been intercepted by decoding Bolshevik communications. General Denikin's and Kolchak's administrations passed on a great number of official documents to the Allies about conditions in the south of Russia and Ukraine as a matter of policy.

Imbrie, Vyborg, Finland: "Report on Conditions in Petrograd by an Agent Acting on Office Instructions" (20 July 1919), 861.00.5111.

"Political and Military Situation of Soviet Russia as Evidenced by Events from 1 April to 11 July, 1919," 861.00.4696.

Red Terror in the Urals: From W. H. Anderson, 5 April 1919: "Doctor Teusler of Red Cross telegraphs me the following . . .," 861.00.4204.

Ukraine under the Reds, 1919: "Khar'kov," 861.00.7791.

Rear admiral, U.S. Navy, U.S. high commissioner in Turkey: Photographs and documents: "Atrocités Bolchevistes," compiled by Bureau de la Presse Russe à Constantinopol, 861.00.6277.

Social conditions under the Bolsheviks: Leslie A. Davies, American consul, "Confidential Report on Conditions in Russia" (12 May 1920), 861.00.7031.

Office of the Commissioner of the United States, Riga, Latvia (22 December 1920), confidential memorandum: "Tula Arms Works," 861.00.6027

Military affairs: Lieutenant Colonel Wilson, British military observer at Reval, British Military Mission, Reval: "Strength of the Red Army. Report on Bolshevism, Appendix X," 861.00.7847.

Siberia (social and political conditions): "Telegram from Tomsk. Subject: Conditions, Workingmen and Factories, Siberia," 23 February 1919, 861.00.504.12.

From General William Graves, commander of U.S. forces in Siberia, August 1919, 861.00.5009.

Social and political conditions under Denikin: Latvian Red Cross official, Andreas Friedenberg, for the Office of the Commissioner of the U.S. for the Baltic provinces of Russia, Riga (14 February 1920), 861.00.6630.

Otdel propagandy Osobogo Soveshchaniia (9 September 1919) "Prilozheniie k politicheskoi svodke no. 225," signed by Statskii Sovetnik Shumakher, 861.00.6320.

"Present Conditions in Don, Kuban' and Terek" (May 1920), 861.00.7081.

From Rear Admiral Newton A. McCully, U.S. Navy, to Secretary of State. Subject: Odessa, fall of, made by Lieutenant Commander Hamilton Bryan: "Report on the Evacuation of Odessa" (30 January–9 February 1920), 861.00.6649, and (19 May 1920), 861.00.7082.

Smolensk Archive, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.

These materials deal primarily with operations against the Greens, reports on the political disposition of the population, and measures of the local party officials to monitor opposition views and activities in Smolensk Province, as well as copies of Cheka documents from Moscow. Among the most important documents are:

B. Ardaev, "Donesenie Roslavl'skomu Uezdvoenkому" (6 August 1919) (Report to the Roslavl' Uezd military commandant), WKP no. 119, Roslavl'.

From Nachal'nik Sekretnoi Operativnoi Chasti Cheka (chief of the Cheka Secret Operations Department) to the Uezdnyi Komitet RKP(b) gorod Roslavl' (Uezd CP Committee) (7 October 1920, top secret), WKP no. 119.

"Svodka o nastroenii mass uezda za mai mesiats" (Compilation of data on political attitudes in the uezd for the month of May), WKP no. 119.

"Protokol zasedaniia Roslavl'skogo Uezdnogo Komiteta RKP(b) (10 October 1920)" (Protocols of the Roslavl CP Committee), WKP no. 119.

"Vsem Gubkomam RKP(b) (8 October 1920), WKP no. 119.

"Piataia Bel'skaia konferentsiia RKP(b)," WKP no. 254.

Trotsky Archive, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.

Nearly all documents in the Trotsky Archive for the 1919–20 period are in *The Trotsky Papers, 1917–1922*, edited and annotated by Jan M. Meijer (The Hague: Mouton, 1964).

Grigoriĭ Aronson Family Archive

Obsuzhdenie (minutes of discussion) of G. Aronson: *K Istorii Pravogo Tsecheniia Sredi Men'shevikov*.

Newspapers of the Civil War Era

Azovskii Krai, (White, Azov)

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Biulleten' TsK PSR (SR underground publication)

Bor'ba (Menshevik, Tiflis)

Bulletin of Information (General Staff A.E.F., Washington, D.C.)

Bulletin of the Russian Information Bureau in the U.S. (New York)

Bulletins of the Russian Liberation Committee (pro-White, London)

Bulletin Russe (Lausanne)

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Les Echos de Russie (Menshevik, Stockholm)

Ekonomicheskaiia zhizn' (Moscow)

Freiheit (USPD, Berlin)

Gazeta pechatnikov (Printers' Union, Moscow)

Information Bulletin (London)

Les Informations Démocratiques (Paris)

Les Informations Démocratiques Russes (Paris)

Les Informations Démocratiques Russes Bulletin (Paris)

Iuzhnaia gazeta (Menshevik, Kharkov)

Iuzhnoe slovo (Odessa)

Izvestiia Khar'kovskogo Soveta (Bolshevik, Kharkov)

Izvestiia Odesskogo Soveta rabochikh deputatov (Bolshevik, Odessa)

Izvestiia Orlovskogo Soveta (Bolshevik, Orel)

Izvestiia Petrogradskogo Gorodskogo Obshchestvennogo Samoupravleniia (Petrograd)

Izvestiia Petrogradskogo Soveta (Bolshevik, Petrograd)

Izvestiia TsIK (Moscow)

Izvestiia TsKa RKP(b) (Bolshevik, Moscow)

Krasnaia gazeta (Petrograd Soviet)

Listok "Delo naroda" (SR underground publication)

Morgon Tid (Stockholm)

Na rubezhe (Tiflis, Georgia)

Nachalo (Menshevik, Kharkov)

Nachalo (Menshevik, Moscow)

Narod (SR, Moscow and Petrograd)

Narodnaia gazeta (White, Rostov-on-Don)

Nash golos (Menshevik, Kharkov)

Nasha gazeta (Kolchak administration, Omsk)

Nasha zaria (Kolchak administration, Omsk)

Nedelia (Vladivostok)

Novyi den' (Menshevik, Petrograd)
Novyi mir (Moscow)
Odesskii nabat (anarchist, Odessa)
Otechestvo (independent—under the White administration—Arkhangelsk)
Petrogradskaia Pravda [*Severnaia kommuna*] (Bolshevik, Petrograd)
Petrogradskii rabochii (Bolshevik, Petrograd)
Peuple (Brussels)
Prilozhenie k "Listku Delo naroda" (SR underground publication)
Pour la Russie (Menshevik, Paris)
Pravda (Bolshevik, Moscow)
Proletarii (Menshevik, Rostov-on-Don)
Put' Sotsial Demokrata (Menshevik, Nikolaev)
Rabochii Internatsional (Menshevik, Moscow)
La République Russe (Menshevik, Paris)
La Russie Démocratique (Union for the Regeneration of Russia, Paris)
Severnaia Kommuna (Bolshevik, Petrograd)
Sovet rabochikh i krest'ian (Bolshevik, Klin)
Struggling Russia (London)
Svobodnaia zhizn' (Rostov-on-Don?)
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Vecherniaia Zvezda (Menshevik, Moscow)
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Politrabotnik (Bolshevik, Moscow)
Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia (SR, Prague)
Sotsialisticheskii Vestnik (Menshevik, Berlin)
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Vestnik Kommissariata vnutrennikh del (NKVD, Moscow)
Vlast' Sovetov (NKVD, Moscow)
Volia Rossii (SR, Prague)
Znamia (Left SR, Berlin)

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Bochumer Archiv für die Geschichte des Widerstandes und der Arbeit (Bochum)

- Byloe (Petrograd)
Cahiers du Mond Russe et Sovietique (Paris)
Canadian Slavonic Papers (Toronto)
The Carl Beck Papers in Russian and East European Studies (Pittsburgh)
Golos minuvshago na chuzhoi storone (Paris)
 Grani (Frankfurt)
International Review of Social History (Amsterdam)
Istoriia SSSR (Moscow)
Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas (Munich)
The Journal of Modern History (Chicago)
Katorga i sylka (Moscow)
Krasnye arkhivy (Moscow)
Kommunist (Moscow)
Letopis' revoliutsii (Kiev)
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